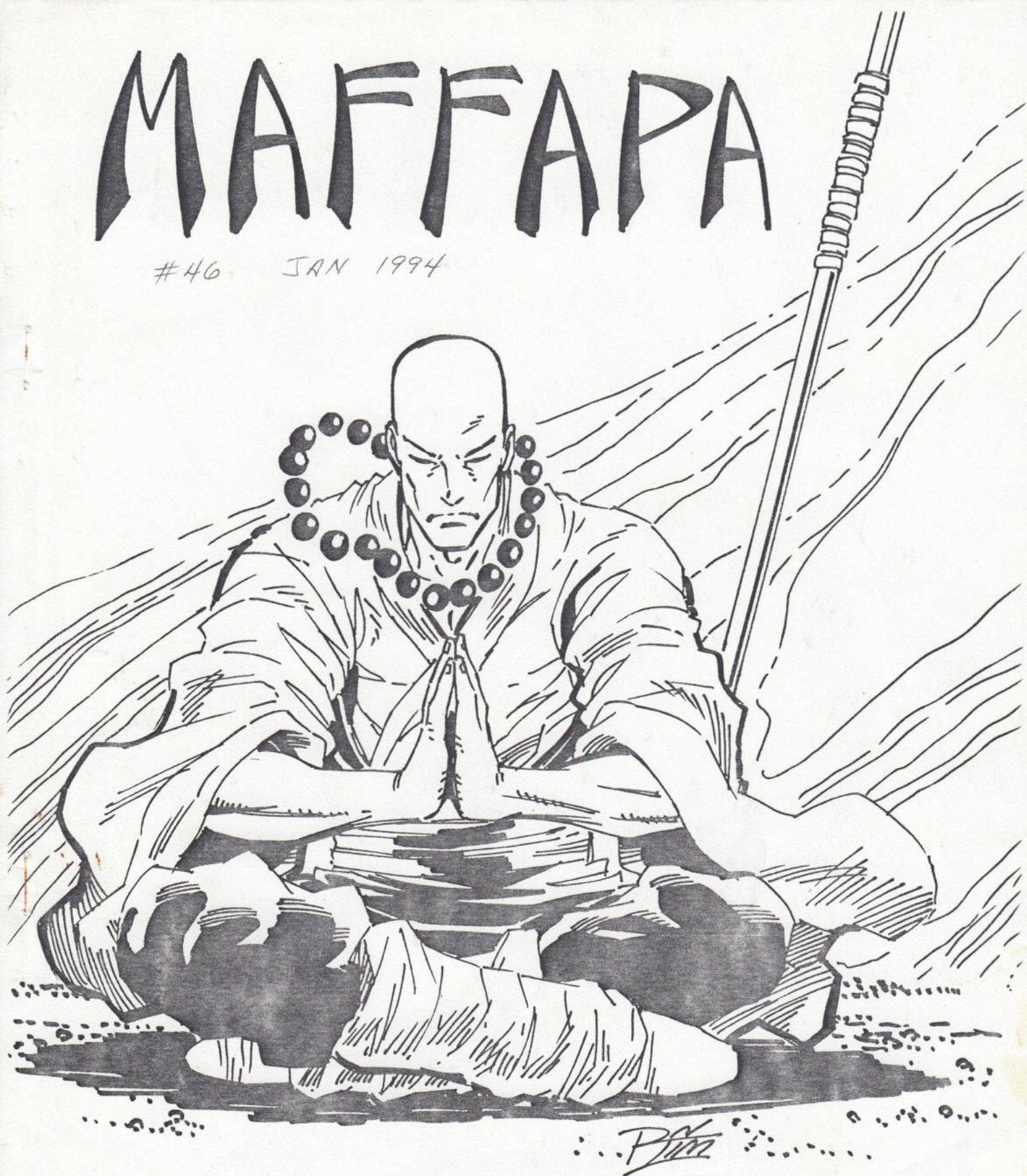


# MAFFAPA

#46 JAN 1994





Welcome to the 46th issue of MAFFAPA, Martial Arts Film Fan (and Asian Culture) APA, for January 1994. Contributions were sent by the following people:

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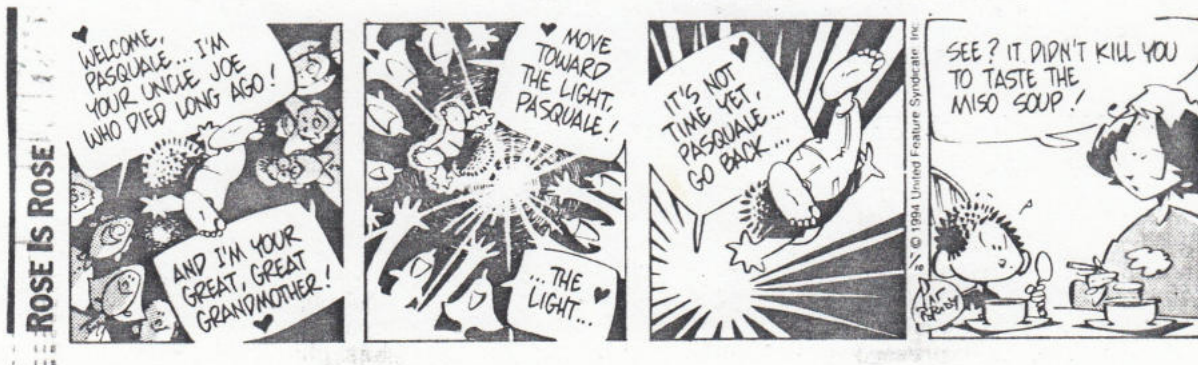
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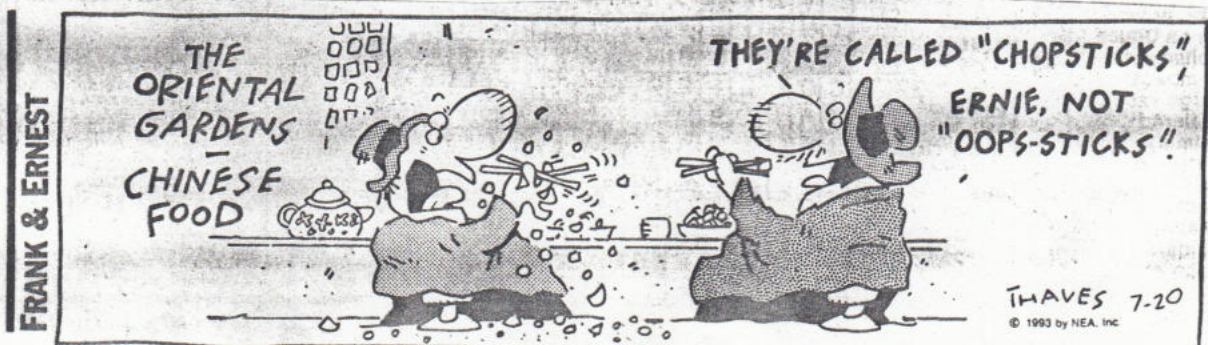
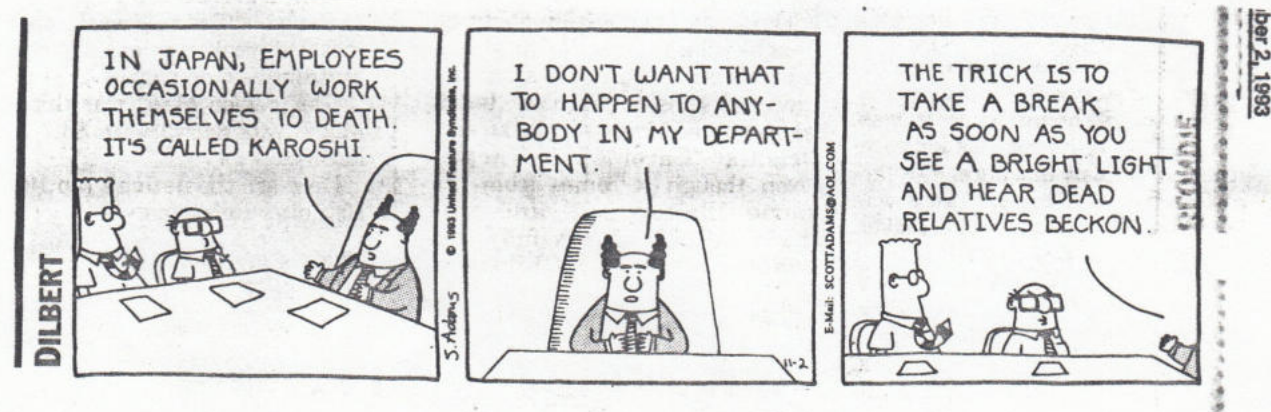
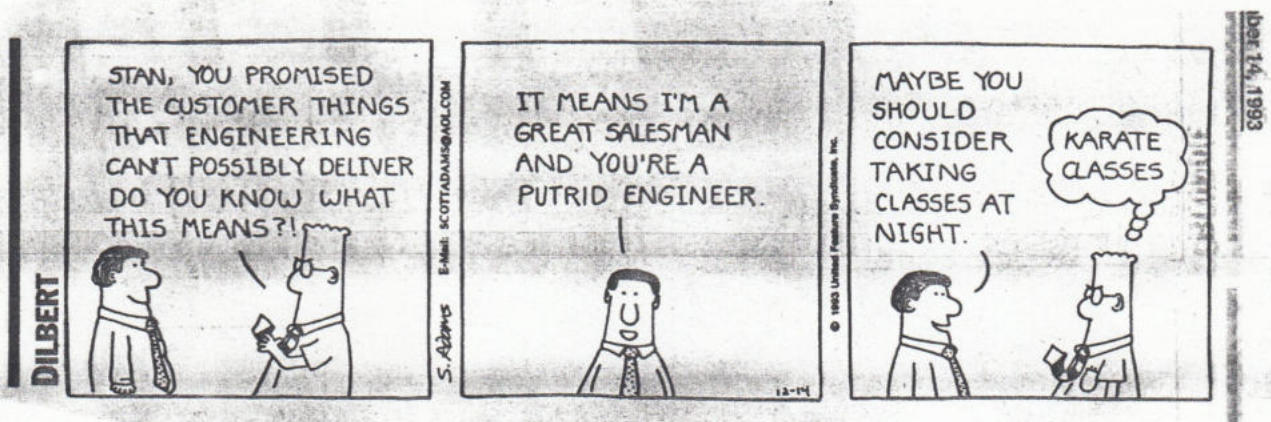
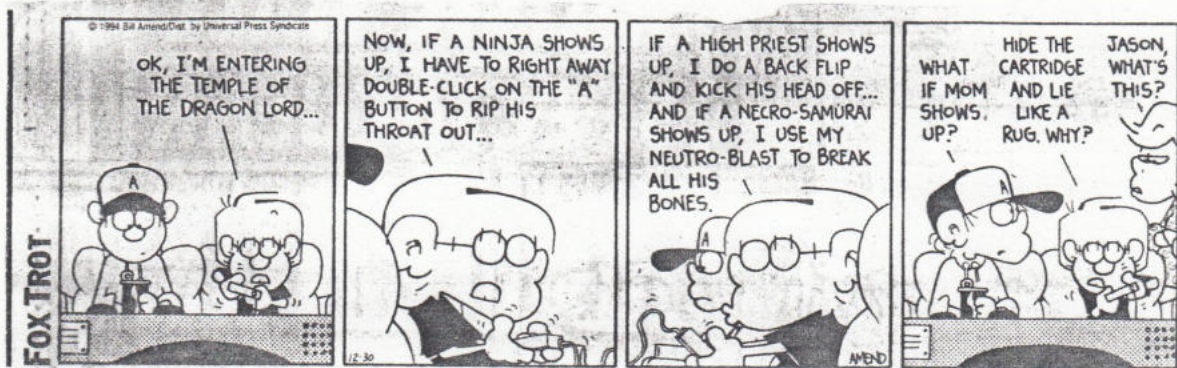
The deadline for Maffapa 47 is April 30, 1994. If your name is not listed above as a contributor, you must contribute to the next issue to receive it. Your contribution, at least one page, must reach Laurine White by the end of April. Minimum contribution is one page per issue, or 2 pages every other issue. Please send 16 copies of each page plus \$1.50 to cover return postage. If you don't send 16 copies, send your original pages, plus \$1 per page to cover copy costs. I prefer checks or stamps (\$1.50 minimum in stamps) instead of cash, which is dangerous to send through the mail. Don't forget a 9x12" self-addressed envelope, so I can send Maffapa 47 to you.

**DISCLAIMER:** I no longer assume any responsibility for what appears in Damon Foster's contributions. Read them at your own risk, either at risk of your eyesight (due to teeny text), stress level, or sense of outrage. If you do read it and get upset, please limit negative response to a personal communication to his PO box. I have always tried to encourage diversity of contribution to Maffapa, and Damon's tendency for outrageous phrases is part of his persona. If you are offended, please do not read his contribution. If you are entertained by his point of view and turn of phrase, then look for more, in the new professionally published ORIENTAL CINEMA, which can now be found at larger newsstands.

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MAFFAPA CONTRIBUTION FROM LAURINE WHITE, 5422COLUSA WAY, SACRAMENTO,  
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In January ex-roommate Nora and I went to a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco to celebrate the arrival of Valerie Alanna, daughter of Victor and Jeannie Lim. She was born November 26, 7 lb 9 oz. Congratulations, Victor and Jeannie! Victor confessed to me it had been awhile since he'd been to see a Chinese movie.

You want trends? Well, there's the current popularity of Chinese sword fantasies, which, I think, began with Tsui Hark's ZU: WARRIORS OF THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN in the mid-80s. A friend received a copy from Japan last year (where it had been on tv) and thought it was a ripoff of CHINESE GHOST STORY. I quickly put it into historical perspective for her. I haven't seen very many of the latest sword movies, haven't watched SWORDSMAN or SWORDSMAN 2 yet. Friends and I watched THE EAST IS RED, which was rather confusing, and there weren't any characters that I cared for. Too bad that Jeff Wong, who used to comment on these films for us, is trying to juggle an Air Force career and a college education. He changed his address (I don't have his new one) and even gave away his VCR, to avois frivolous distractions like Chinese videos.

Another trend is that the soundtracks for these Hong Kong movies sometimes include absolutely fabulous music, written specifically for those movies, no longer ripped off from spaghetti westerns. Last issue I highly recommended the ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA CD released by a Hollywood company. The soundtracks for FONG SAI YUK and THE HEROIC TRIO are also beautiful. Too bad I don't know where to find the Hong Kong CD soundtracks. They may have once been in stock at 2 CD stores I know of in San Francisco Chinatown but have long been sold out. THE EAST IS RED CD, which I bought last August, is no longer there either. Those stores have only a couple of CDs with kung fu fighters or swordsmen on the covers, and those have the themes for Chinese series and movies from years ago. They only duplicate what I have on audiotape. (But it's nice to have A CD, in case the tape gets damaged.)

What's another trend. Since RISING SUN, there no longer seem to be new novels concerning the machinations of vengeful Japanese executives. Instead, we get tv episodes with yakuza: that episode of RENEGADE with Carey Hiroyuki-Tagawa, and a recent episode of TIME TRAX, with a criminal yakuza leader of the future come to the present to unify the oyabuns of today. (The actor spoke English-accented Japanese and his acting stunk too.) Soon Tek-oh had a role as a retired policeman. If you missed the first TEK WARS special, the gang boss was a long-haired pretty boy Japanese.

Despite a groan from someone here, I'm giving a tremendous rave (over-enthusiastic recommendation, not trendy all-night party) to a recent VAMPIRE novel called ANNO DRACULA by Kim Newman! It is a marvelous read and well-researched. The year is 1886, the city London. Sherlock Holmes is in a concentration camp, Van Helsing's head adorns a spike outside Queen Victoria's palace. Count Dracula defeated him in their encounters, then went on to charm the Widow of Windsor (Queen Victoria), wed her to become Prince Consort, and start turning other Brits into vampires, as well as welcoming vampire refugees from the rest of Europe. The carpathians, his elite bodyguards, are the equivalent of the Gestapo. With secret warrants they are seeking out



and putting up homosexuals on stakes (a cruel way to die), due to Vlad Tepes' hatred of sodomy. (He had been used by the Turks when he had been their hostage as a young man.) Criminals and rebels also meet slow death on the stakes.

Jack the Ripper stalks Whitechapel, killing new-made vampire prostitutes. (In this timeline, "Jack" is the sole surviving human from Van Helsing's small group.) The police are raiding underworld hangouts, trying to find a clue to his identity. So the criminals, like Prof. Moriarty, Colonel Moran, and Fu Manchu, unhappy with the raids, have also put a price on his head. Both they and the Diogenes Club (Holmes' brother Mycroft is a member) have ordered British agent, Charles Beauregard, to find the Ripper. Beauregard is still a "warm", that is, a living human. While it has become fashionable to cross over, many people haven't decided yet. Beauregard is aided in his search by a humanitarian female vampire, Genevieve Dieudonne, who crossed over in the 15th century. She is a few years older than Dracula, is no friend of his (considers him a madman), and is from a different, non-transforming strain of vampire. Many of the newly-created in dracula's line, especially the poor, are dying as their bodies reject their attempted changes into wolves or bats. Genevieve is being stalked for unknown reasons by an ancient hopping Chinese vampire who throws masses of butterflies from his silken sleeve.

Among the Ripper suspects are those weird scientists, the Doctors Jekyll and Moreau. Oscar Wilde has a walk-on part. Throwaway references are made to various fictional characters of the time, like detective Max Carrados, newsman Le Queaux, Rupert of Hentzau. The really good news is that this book is still in hardback, and should be in pb sometime this year. Watch for it!

Damon's isn't the only zine out there for Asian films. I've mentioned M.A.M.A. before. Some of the other zines cover gory horror movies along with martial arts films. If you aren't into gore, you can skip those. I can recommend CINERAIDER #1, a slick halfsize zine with 50+ pages, \$10 for 3 issues, check payable to Richard Akiyama PO Box 240226, Honolulu, HI 96824-0226. There's a large section in the middle, covering the sexy Chinese movies (SEX AND ZEN, etc.), but there's lots of coverage of regular martial arts movies too.

A zine the comicbook store set aside for me is the Jan/Feb 1994 issue of VIDEO WATCHDOG, \$5.50, 80 pages. Video Watchdog is "the Perfectionist's Guide to Fantastic Video." There are reviews of the LD release of John Woo's THE KILLER and the anime video, CAGLIOSTRO CASTLE, DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY, and a major article on the LD release of the Star Wars trilogy. Eric Sulev ably covers the Asian movie scene; this issue he writes about Baby Cart #5-6, CRIME STORY, FONG SAI YUK 2, the HEROIC TRIO, RAPED BY AN ANGEL. Lone Wolf and Cub 1-6 are available from Video Search of Miami, which deals in bootleg videos.

Antarctic Press in San Antonio has announced a new zine they'll be publishing, starting in Feb '94, called SENTAI, to cover the Japanese live action film industry. They said their inspiration was going to Hong Kong movie festivals to watch films like CITY HUNTER and MAGIC COP. Check your local comicbook store for SENTAI. If it isn't available, ask for it. Comicbook stores don't always order titles from those smaller publishers unless there's some demand for them.



Who's Who in Japanese Historical Dramas  
by Robert Walsdorff

PART ONE

Fans of Japanese historical dramas (jidai geki) become familiar with many real life Japanese historical figures which turn up again and again. As with most legendary figures, fiction becomes so immersed with fact that it is often hard to separate the two. How the characters are portrayed will often vary greatly. This can become confusing.

Below is a handy list to refer to the next time you are watching one of these dramas and one of these characters appear and you want to know who they really were. It is a brief historical sketch of that person's place in Japanese history.

**Himiko**

She was the Queen of third century Japan, though Japan was still not a unified nation. According to legend, she lived in a huge fenced in palace guarded by soldiers and no one except her younger brother could even get a glimpse of her. No authentic literature about Himiko exists today, she is only mentioned in some ancient Chinese records. Her life is shrouded in sheer mystery.

**Emperor Shomu** (701 - 756)

He was the Emperor of the Nara Period. Under his rule the pompous culture of aristocracy blossomed. He is credited with spreading the Buddhist religion throughout Japan.

**Taira - No - Kiyomori** (1118 - 1181)

He was supreme commander of the Heishi family and was a key figure in the turning point of aristocratic government to military government. He won the reins of government after two decisive battles. He had intended for his family to continue to rule, but after his death the family was defeated by its long time enemy the Genji family. The classic book Heike Monogatari chronicles the rise and fall of the Heishi family.

**Minamoto - No - Yoritomo** (1147 - 1149)

He was the founder of the Kamakura Shogunate, Japan's first military government. Along with Minamoto - No - Yoshitsune, he is responsible for defeating the Heishi family and taking over the reins of government. In order to maintain his power, he ruthlessly and systematically got rid of Minamoto No - Yoshitsune and most of his other kinsman. As a result, the Genji family lasted only 20 years after his death.



**Minamoto - No - Yoshitsune** (1159 - 1189)

He was a tragic figure that has long been popular among the Japanese. As a youngster, he met a priest called Benkei, who believed he was the strongest man in the world. Benkei would challenge samurai and take their swords from them. When he challenged Yoshitsune, Yoshitsune defeated him, using only his flute. Benkei became his loyal follower. As military commander of the Genji Family, he was largely responsible for the defeat of the Heishi Family. However, his brother, Yoritomo, became jealous of his reputation and sent a large army to defeat him. It is said that when his friend Benkei died from a shower of arrows all over his body, Yoshitsune committed suicide.

**Hojo Masako** (1157 -1125)

She is often referred to as the female shogun. She was the wife of Yoritomo. When the third shogun in the Minamoto line was assassinated she was responsible for holding the government together. As a woman she could not officially rule, but she had the power to appoint her brother Hojo Yoshitoki as the official shogun. This started the Hojo line of Shoguns. The Minamoto line had ceased to exist after her father killed the second shogun and his nephew killed the third Minamoto shogun, both shoguns Masako's sons.

**Ashikaga Takauji** (1305 - 1358)

He was one of the military commanders serving the Kamakura Shogunate. He joined the scheme by Emperor Godaigo to overthrow the shogunate. The scheme succeeded. However, Takauji became dissatisfied with how the Emperor disregarded the samurai who helped restore him to power and instead wanted only the aristocrats to rule. Takauji headed a rebel army that expelled Godaigo from Kyoto and established the Muromachi shogunate, which lasted until 1573 but lost much of its real power during the last hundred years. Until the end of World War Two, Ashikaga Takauji's name was omitted from Japanese textbooks, as he was branded a traitor to the Imperial Dynasty. However, it is said that he was very popular among the people who knew him and was considered to be placid and generous.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT TIME



HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE!

言売んで、くたささい。

One of the interesting articles I read in INTERSECT-JAPAN AND THE WORLD (published by PHP) was entitled, "Invasion of the Discounters". Enterprising retailers are trying to win over newly cost-conscious Japanese consumers from the well-established department stores. The prestigious department stores are very old and have good reputations. The new retailers are cutting frills that are offered by the department stores yet still concentrate on values. Even a famous department store like MITSUKOSHI is feeling the pinch. Discounters advertise that they sell everything cheap. This message reaches the recession-torn consumers. They sell everything from roses to electronics at one-third off the retail price. BIC a famous retailer announced that this is a shopping revolution. Discounters have forced department stores to start to dramatically change the way they do business. Still many consumers will not part from the department stores which offer full-service to those willing to pay for it.

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In 21, there were some interesting facts.

4.35 % of the Japanese call their dog: KORO, making it the most popular canine name.

53 % the number of male & female in their twenties who said that they're afraid of AIDS. A popular advertisement advises: "Think before you link."

40 % of the heavy smokers suffer from athlete's foot, researched by the Osaka Medical College.

飛行 ニュース

In July 1994, the new Kansai International Airport will open. It is unique because it is being built on a man-made island in Osaka Bay & will be Japan's first 24-hour airport. Kansai is the term that refers to Osaka-Kyoto-Kobe-Nara sphere of cities in western Japan. Four centuries ago Osaka was a booming city of a million people. The glory of the Japanese art, literature and economy were centered in these major cities. Then much of this glory moved eastward to Tokyo. Now Kansai wants to bring the glory back to where it belongs. They believe that Tokyo and eastern Japan has far too much power for the rest of Japan's own good. There is little chance that Tokyo won't continue as the political and social center of Japan. Tokyo is the "International City" of Japan. But there is a good fight brewing. Why? Millions of dollars or about 40 trillion yen have gone to major & minor projects all designed to make Kansai a player of International dimensions. The current Osaka International Airport is overcrowded (and I had the experience of landing in Osaka last May and will agree). The new airport is an essential link with the world. Dozens of airlines once denied access to Osaka are now lining up to bring flights into the new airport. Everyone is invited to come see for themselves!



Patricia Gonzalez, 3595 Bainbridge Ave. Ave.#2B, Bronx, NY 10467

Hi everybody!

Lots to talk about so I'll get right into it!

**HARD TARGET:** I got to see John Woo's American directing debut of the new Jean-Claude Van Damme movie in early September. I loved every violent minute of it! I'll be the first to admit that I am not very familiar with the films of John Woo, but it was his directing that saved this film from becoming another so-so American martial arts film. The camera angles, use of lighting, slow motion and unbelievable stunt choreography made this film stand above most of the American martial arts films as well as all the other films of Mr. Van Damme. The use of slow motion in some of the fight scenes actually improved how they looked on the screen (extremely painful)!!! Lance Henriksen (he played the android Bishop in *Aliens* and an L.A.P.D. detective in *the Terminator*) as the villain Emil Fouchon was **superb**. He is a flexible actor who can play both heros and villains. This movie is a good example of how a great movie director can make the lead hero in a film come across better on screen than if the movie were directed by someone else. Mr. Van Damme should have John Woo direct all of his films! I'm certainly going to make it a point to try and see John Woo's earlier stuff.

#### JAPANESE SCI-FI RULES AT THE MEADOWLANDS HILTON

**FILM COLLECTORS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION:** On Saturday, September 11th I attended this **great** convention at the Meadowlands Hilton Hotel in Secaucus, New Jersey. Only ten minutes from Manhattan by bus, it had 100 dealers tables mostly selling posters, lobby cards, stills, pressbooks and tons of other film memorabilia from the 1920's to present day. As I also **LOVE** Japanese monster and sci-fi films I almost fainted when I saw **original** lobby cards from some of my favorite films. I got lobby cards from **RODAN**, **BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE**, **THE HUMAN VAPOR**, **VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE** and **GORATH**. They were a bit yellowed but had held up fairly well through the ravages of time. I also got a pack of **Godzilla** trading cards. These are 80 color cards with scenes of all the **Godzilla** films from the first one to **Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah** as well as other Toho monster and sci-fi films of the 50's, 60's and 70's.

On Saturday, October 30th I attended the **CHILLER THEATRE TOY, MODEL AND FILM EXPO's HALLOWEEN CONVENTION**. Killer show! I picked up some more lobby cards and got to meet Zacherle.



**Police Story 3: Supercop** - What a kick-ass film! This was the first time I had ever seen a Jackie Chan film. I loved it! Co-star Michelle Yeoh got to kick some major ass in this film. One thing I like about Hong Kong action films is that women are given the opportunity to have as much fun as men are. They get to punch, kick, shoot and pummel the crap out of the bad guys unlike the women in American movies. This is how Cynthia Rothrock and Cynthia Kahn have been able to make names for themselves. Anyhow, I've enclosed a review of Supercop as part of my trib.

**Wicked City:** At last this great Japanese animated horror film has made it to the American shores! I haven't seen this movie yet, but so far the reviews have been decent. I've enclosed a Daily article on Japanese animation as well as a review of Wicked City by the Phantom of the Movies.

I guess that is all for now. See you all in the next issue!



JACKIE CHAN IS...

# SUPERHOP

"...INVIGORATING ADVENTURE-COMEDY...  
THE MOST COMPLETELY SATISFYING  
JACKIE CHAN VEHICLE"

- David Chute, CALENDAR

"...TRULY AMAZING STUNTS!"

- Jeff Menell, HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"CHAN'S BOYISH CHARM AND  
SELF-EFFACING HUMOR, AND HIS  
CAREFULLY CHOREOGRAPHED  
STUNTS BRING THE HOUSE DOWN."

- Jami Bernard, NY POST

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New York, NY 10013

JACKIE CHAN IS...

# SUPERHOP



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## KUNG-FU 'COP' KICKS INTO HIGH GEAR

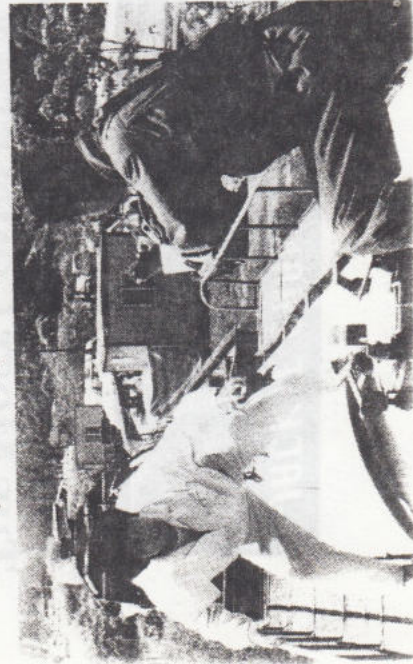
By PHANTOM OF THE MOVIES  
DAILY NEWS

"Super Cop: Police Story III" might be the best Jackie Chan movie yet to surface Stateside. This time around, the veteran Asian action icon leaves the directing to Tong Kwei Lai and concentrates instead on his onscreen kung-fu and comedy chores. Our standard but swiftly paced and neatly textured storyline offers another variation on the popular Mismatched Partners formula. Undercover ace Chan's forced pairing with feisty Cantonese cop Michelle Yeoh allows for a multitude of cross cultural riffs in a Hong Kong vs. Communist Mainland vein.

(It may also represent something of a peace gesture on Chan's part, since Mainland China annexes Hong Kong in 1997.)

To get the goods on a major smack trafficker, Chan assumes a criminal identity, springs the top villain's younger brother "Panther" from a Mainland labor camp and infiltrates the gang's inner ranks. Yeoh, posing as Chan's sister, joins our hero for a virtually nonstop spate of spectacular chases, shootouts and, of course, the elaborately choreographed martial-arts displays that have elevated Chan to international action-star status.

Chan doesn't neglect his trademark comedy elements. One particularly funny scene finds the undercover Chan accompanied by three of his newfound criminal allies, forced to visit his fictional Mainland "family" - a scam everyone but Chan seems to be in on, including his Hong Kong police superior, who poses in drag as our hero's elderly mother. An ill-timed encounter with girlfriend Maggie Cheung at a Malaysian resort likewise leads to comic complications. Boasting Chan's biggest budget to date (a reported \$10 mil), "Super Cop" hops all over the Orient, making primo use of its authentic locations. As per Chan custom, alternately amusing and anxiety-provoking outtakes from some of the pic's most dangerous stunt



Jackie Chan fights on top of the train.

## EVERYBODY WAS KUNG FU FIGHTING IN 'SUPERCOP'

By KEVIN THOMAS  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

To watch Jackie Chan, Hong Kong's king of kung fu comedy, in the fresh and exhilarating "Super Cop", is like watching Douglas Fairbanks Sr. or one of the silent era clowns in one of their biggest hits. A whirling dervish with a Beatles mop top and an impish grin, the boyish Chan is a one-man Cirque du Soleil, and "Super Cop" shows off both his sense of humor and his acrobatic martial arts wizardry just as effectively as "Safety Last" served Harold Lloyd seven decades ago.

"Super Cop" is as topical as tomorrow's headlines but gets back to the basics of discovering what can happen when you turn loose an athletic, charismatic star, backed by a clever plot and firm direction, and then capture his every move and expression with virtuoso cinematography and editing. When Chan with his sunny personality, tilts at life's comic absurdities, he's doing what Buster Keaton or Laurel and Hardy did long ago.

A fearless, devil-may-care Hong Kong Cop, Chan is the inevitable choice for a highly dangerous mission. He's to be sent to China as an undercover agent to retrieve from a prison labor camp a gangster named Panther (Yuen Wah), who is in turn to lead Chan to Panther's

Hong Kong based older brother Chaibat (Kin Tsang), a drug lord so mighty that the authorities believe that his capture would diminish the Southeast Asian drug trade by half. Chan's adventures lead him to a secret jungle compound along the border between Thailand and Cambodia and culminate in a whirlwind chase through Kuala Lumpur - what a beautiful city! - involving a helicopter, every kind of street vehicle and finally a train.

Arriving in Canton, Chan meets his match in his new boss, a People's Republic of China secret agent (Michelle Yeoh) who's as elegant as she is skilled in martial arts - and lots more disciplined than Chan. They're a terrific team, and the whole business of extricating Panther from the prison camp, a coal-mining site, is as much a cliffhanger as a chapter ending in the serial "The Perils of Pauline". But it's just a prologue to all the nonstop action and comedy that follows.

Chan and Yeoh play with just enough tongue-in-cheekery: The humor is often broad but never lapses into burlesque. Joining the fun in the final reel is beautiful Maggie Cheung as Chan's lively girlfriend, a tour guide who arrives in Kuala Lumpur at the very worst moment possible.

Chan, who co-executive produced, director Stanley Tong and their cast and crew recall what Hollywood has largely forgotten: how to make pure escapist entertainment that's fast, light and unpretentious. "Super Cop" and other Hong Kong pictures like it rely, out of economic prudence, on making imaginative use of the full resources of the medium rather than relying on mega-buck production design and gadgetry. The film's extensive use of colorful and far-flung authentic locations are in fact a key appeal.



Jackie Chan, the action machine!



## STOP THE PRESSES!

Just as we were about to print Anime-gossip, we got word from Tokyo that our latest license had just been signed!

We're very pleased and proud to be able to tell you that AnimeEigo has licensed "Ah! My Goddess" (Aa! Megamisama) from Kodansha.

Hailed as one of the best OVA series of 1993, "AMG" is the story of a very nice young man who phones for pizza, gets the wrong number, and ends up living with a very nice young goddess.

It's romantic! It's mysterious! It's weird! And it's coming to America in '94. More details in our next issue (as well as announcements of new licenses)

## NEW CATALOG AND ORDER FORM

Our product line is now so big that it's gotten hard to keep track of all the products and special deals. To help, we've created our special order form (attached to AnimeGossip), which can be used to order any (or all!) of our tapes, LDs, sets, UY Club offerings, T-Shirts and Posters. It even has a worksheet that helps you figure out how much the bill is going to be (order COD or use a credit card and we'll do the math for you!).

Also included is a catalog of our AnimeEigo Accessories (that's a fancy way of saying T-Shirts and Posters).

## SILLY SLOGANS SWAMP NORTH CAROLINA!

Well, we asked for them, so it's our fault, but we never expected such a huge response to last issue's slogan contest! At last count, over 100 of you have dumped over 400 slogans on us, resulting in a veritable holy war as everyone here thinks a different slogan is the best.

So what we've done is pick what we think are the best slogans, and we want you to tell us which one you think is best. In return, we'll award 3 Riding Bean dubbed tapes (1 each) to 3 people who suggest the slogan we finally use. The catch (you knew there had to be one, didn't you?) is that you have to send in your suggestion using our new order form.\*

- #1: Now we're talking Anime!
- #2: First let it be written, then let it be dubbed
- #3: The Voice of Anime
- #4: Resounding Anime
- #5: Toon In, Turn On, Flip Out
- #6: The Best Movies You'll Never Read
- #7: Subbed or Dubbed, Movies to be Loved
- #8: An Understandable Language at an Affordable Price
- #9: We lose nothing in the Translation.
- #10: Changing the way you watch Anime
- #11: Dubs without Flubs
- #12: Breaking the Sound Barrier
- #13: These are not your father's cartoons.

We welcome additional suggestions or improvements to these slogans.

## THE PRICE OF BUBBLEGUM POPS

We've just lowered the price on the Bubblegum Crisis LDs from \$64.95 to \$39.95. This means that BGC on LD is about half the price it is on tape!

## THE PRICE OF BUBBLEGUM POP

Our Tokyo office has just airmailed us our first shipment of Bubblegum Crisis and Riding Bean CDs, which we will be making available to faithful AnimeGossip readers at low-low prices. We'll be finalizing the pricing after they wend their way through customs, but if you

are interested in any of the following CDs, please write or phone -- initial quantities are limited.

Riding Bean Soundtrack  
Bubblegum Crisis Complete Vocal  
Collection Volumes 1 and 2  
Bubblegum Crisis #8 Soundtrack

We'll have an update on CDs in the next AnimeGossip; we hope to make them a regular part of our product line.

## MORE LD MADNESS

You've been asking, and we've been listening. So we're going to release more and more of our products on LD. Coming in '94 you'll see LD's of all of the **Urusei Yatsura Movies, Bubblegum Crash and AD Police Files**. And most of our new '94 releases, such as **Ah! My Goddess**, will go to LD as well. Stay tuned for more details!

## A NEW FACE

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to the newest member of our production staff in Tokyo, George Arriola. George got his start working on shows like the Simpsons, then decided to move up into the "big leagues." Hopefully, it will take him a while to figure out where the big leagues actually are...

Next issue we'll profile another AnimeEigo minion.

## UPCOMING RELEASES

They are all listed on our fancy new order form, so we're not going to list them here. Go look at the order form. While you're looking, get a pen and try it out - it's easy, it's fun, and it's relatively inexpensive.

See you next issue, we'll have lots of new goodies to let you know about!

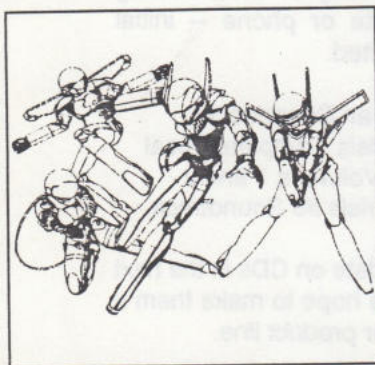
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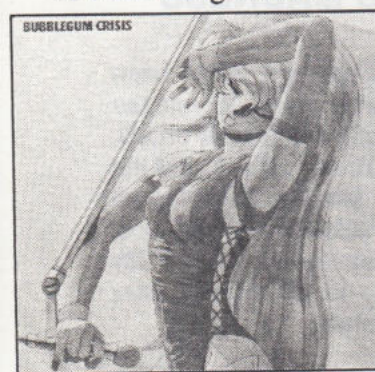
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**HIGH-CALIBER CARTOON:** A graphic scene of violence in "Wicked City," opening tomorrow at Angelika 57

OCTOBER 28, 1993

# Anime Attraction

Japan's explicit and violent cartoons are an adults-only cultural art form

By **LEWIS BEALE**

Daily News Staff Writer

**THEY'VE BEEN DATING FOR** three months, and tonight they're finally having sex.

The lovemaking is hot and satisfying, but then fantasy becomes nightmare: The woman metamorphoses into a buglike beast. Her arms turn into snapping claws, her privates grow piranha-like teeth that threaten to cut off her boyfriend's manhood.

But Bug Lady — actually a revolutionary from an alternate dimension — fails to emasculate her partner, so she scuttles out of bed on all fours and down the outside of the apartment building.

This is no drug-induced hallucina-

tion — it's one of the opening scenes in "Wicked City," a feature-length animated film that opens tomorrow for a one-week run at Angelika 57 and weekend midnight shows at the Angelika Film Center. "Wicked City" is the latest example of *anime* — a strain of adult Japanese animation that makes traditional Disney-style efforts look positively childish.

"It's a very serious cultural art form from an important country," says Linda Simensky, director of animation at the Nickelodeon Channel. "It's as important as any kind of film that exists in any culture's cinema."

Anime like "Wicked City," "Akira" and "Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend," which have been released theatrically in this country, run the

range of cyberpunk, horror, fantasy and post-apocalyptic sci-fi.

The most interesting films grapple with post-Hiroshima themes of destruction, mutation and rebirth. "Akira," a \$7 million production considered to be the masterpiece of the genre, is about motorcycle gangs and psychic rebirth in a post-apocalyptic "Neo Tokyo" of the 21st century.

Like "Akira," many anime are based on comic books and feature heavy dollops of sexuality and extreme violence. So extreme that "Overfiend" became the only animated feature since 1972's "Fritz the Cat" rated unsuitable for viewers under 18.

But these films can also be art of the highest order. "The animation is so

See **JAPAN** page 55



# Japan Lets the Animation Run Wild in Cinema

## FROM COVER

completely cinematic," said the Phantom of the Movies in his "Akira" review, "[I] often found it easy to forget [I] wasn't watching a live-action movie." Janet Maslin of The New York Times called the same film "a phenomenal work of animation [with a] post-apocalyptic mood, high-tech trappings, thrilling artwork and wide array of bizarre characters."

Anime come directly out of a highly sophisticated Japanese visual tradition. Because the Japanese language is based on pictograms, storytelling through comic books and animation is an accepted cultural concept. Comics are the largest portion of the Japanese publishing industry; read by all ages and classes, they can be found in almost every bookstore in the country. And animation of all types is ubiquitous on television.

Jennifer Robertson, director of the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan, traces anime back to "the woodblock-print medium, dating from the 16th century onward, where you get some very explicit sexual themes, and scenes of violence as well." And, she adds, "the cartoon media have long dealt with a wide range of themes, from the cutesy to the violently explicit."

Americans first became aware of Japanese animation in the late 1960s, when the

cartoon series "Speed Racer" was syndicated here. Other series — "Astroboy," "Giantor" — soon followed. In the mid-'70s, giant robot cartoons began popping up on local TV stations, where they were taped by fans, traded and shown at science fiction conventions. But anime was largely limited to TV until 1989, when "Akira" became a cult theatrical hit (grossing nearly \$2 million at the box office) and other films began showing up on home video.

Mike Pascuzzi of New York-based anime distributor Central Park Media says urban males age 14 to 29 constitute the primary market for Japanese animation. "They are fairly well-educated," says Pascuzzi, "many with computer or engineering backgrounds. The quality of the animation is what catches a lot of people's eyes, as well as the comparison to American cartoons — anime have much more mature themes."

They certainly look that way compared with "American Tail" or "Aladdin." But Robertson says it's important not to make exaggerated claims for the underlying seriousness of anime — they're still entertainment.

"The ideology of these films isn't much different from the sci-fi kind of dystopian, anarchic, amoral, high-tech society you get in American-produced videos of the same genre," she says. "I'm not sure there's a profound cultural critique



**LITTLE BUDDY:** Two of the characters in "Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend"

[of society]."

There are currently almost 200 anime titles on the video market. Tie-ins include CD-ROM discs, trading cards, comic books and live-action features. It's a solid cult, maybe even a long-lasting one, but it has

its limitations.

"There are key directors and key films," says Carl Macek of Streamline Pictures, which distributes "Wicked City" and 60 other anime titles. "There are only a few originals out there; after awhile, they all

look the same. If the audience is cultivated properly, it has validity as much as any B-movie type series has validity — the 'Nightmare on Elm Street' series, the Jason series. This is the animated equivalent of B-movie production."



# Something 'Wicked' this way comes

BY PHANTOM OF THE MOVIES

★★★

WICKED CITY. Animated feature directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri. Dubbed. At Angeltika 57. Unrated.

## YOSHIAKI KAWAJIRI'S VISU-

ally sweeping "Wicked City" — the latest release from anime-oriented Streamline Pictures — depicts a future Earth about to enter into a nonaggression pact renewal with humanoid inhabitants of a parallel dimension dubbed the Black World.

Crucial to the treaty's success is the presence of pint-sized, perennially horny

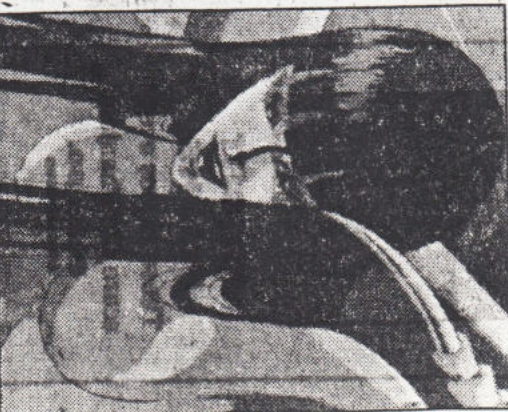
negotiator Meiar, whose planned appearance at a secret Tokyo peace conference is threatened by Black World extremists. It's up to suave, romantic Earth hero Taki and crossover Black World femme agent Makie to protect Meiar from potential harm.

As in many "Japanimation" features — most outrageously in the recent NC-17 offering "Urusei Yatsura: Legend of the Overlord" — "Wicked City" blends comic-book action with adult erotic interludes, frequently grisly in nature. On the latter front, "Wicked City" comes through early on, when Taki shares an ill-advised tryst with an undercover

Black World terrorist who transforms into a grotty spiderwoman.

While "Wicked City" can be interpreted as an allegory — mighty modern Japan's dealings with an often economically envious West — the flick is far more interested in furnishing sex, violence, romance and sci-fi tinged action than political philosophy.

Director Kawajiri's kinetic animation, Kiseo Choo's lively but linear story line and American adaptor Carl Macek's adroit dubbing combine to make "Wicked City" more accessible than many of its more esoteric anime counterparts. Fans of the genre should enjoy.



TAKI before the change



Jacqueline D. Sims  
309 16th Avenue North  
Birmingham, Alabama 35204-2163

I have heard some really great music in the animated movies and television shows from Japan I have seen recently.

My favorite so far is the music to the animated movie "Robot Carnival". This movie is divided into eight unrelated segments with only the opening and closing segments being related. The music written for each segment was great; my favorite was the music written for the "Clouds" segment. This segment was a "Pinnochio" type story where a robot boy becomes a real boy. I also loved the closing theme which had a lovely waltz type melody. I liked the music so much that I bought the compact disc soundtrack so that I could enjoy the movie without visual images and sound effects to distract me.

The Robot Carnival music is universal because it is all instrumental; no words are needed to get the feeling and spirit of this music across in my opinion. I also think that this music gives many composers here a run for their money.

Another movie whose music I enjoyed was from the animated movie "Crying Freeman". I would like to have this soundtrack but I don't know how to go about getting it right now because I can't read the Japanese characters at the end of this movie that would tell me who did this music.

The music to the animated television series and movie "Hokuto No Ken" a.k.a. "Fist of the North Star" was good also. You can hear a few english words sprinkled here and there. I would also like these soundtracks if I can find them.

The music to the Jidai-geki (historical) television series "Miyamoto Musashi", "Mushashibo Benkei", and "Takeda Shingen" were a great mixture of traditional Japanese and more modern symphony instruments. It is a welcome change from most of what I hear on the radio these days.

It is very ironic that the Japanese music buying public is very likely to know much more about our recording artists than we know and have heard about their performers. This is very sad because I have recently heard music from Japanese artists that American artists cannot touch.

I hope this will change soon.



More "stuff." Susan is back into MA movies, thanks to a mini Hong Kong film festival at the local University theater: "Chinese Ghost Story" and "Operation Condor II." I filled the "opinions" book with more recent movie suggestions. One can always hope...



Sarah Laurel Porter

## ***Chronicle of a death foretold*** ***(death of actor Brandon Lee while shooting 'The Crow')***

by Jeffrey Goodell

***...The death of the actor on the set of the movie brought into focus the perils that carelessness and irresponsible resourcefulness can bring to movie-making. Lee was fatally shot by a bullet from a gun used during the shooting of a scene in his supposedly career-launching film.***

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**A** horrifying sequence of escalating mistakes, niggling penny-pinching, and appalling oversights set the stage for the tragic death of Brandon Lee

Things got off to a slow start that night on stage 4 at Carolco Studios in Wilmington, North Carolina. The cast and crew of *The Crow* should have been ready to go at 7:45 P.M., but it was almost 9:30 before the board finally clapped down for the first shot. It was day 50 of a scheduled 58-day shoot, and the crew was bone-tired. They were shooting a flashback from the life of the movie's hero, Eric Draven, played by Brandon Lee. In this weird, violent urban fairy tale, Eric, who has been brutally murdered by a gang of drug dealers, comes back to avenge himself on his killers. Tonight there were nine small sequences on the schedule, none more than a couple of minutes long.

The set was appropriately eerie, a large open loft with industrial-style support beams and dusty antiques, a kind of retro-futuristic rock 'n' roller's lair. Then there were the drug dealers, led by a couple of trashy-looking punks named T-Bird, played by David Patrick Kelly, and Funboy, played by Michael Massee.

Since Lee wasn't needed in the first couple of shots, he didn't arrive on the set until about midnight. He appeared

pale and thin, as he had for the entire production—he had modeled the look of his character on Chris Robinson, the lead singer for the Black Crowes, and had lost sixteen pounds to give himself a suitably ghoulish air. He was dressed in a black leather jacket, black boots, tight corduroys, and a T-shirt with the name of his character's band in big block letters across the front: HANG-MAN'S JOKE.

While wardrobe was taping the top of his boots down tight against his legs to give him a sleeker look, he chatted with Sara Seidman, one of the stand-ins. He told her that, for the first time in weeks, he had been able to get a full night's sleep. "He was in great spirits," Seidman recalls. "He said, 'I feel like a real person again.'" A few minutes later, they called him onto the set to rehearse the murder scene.

It was a fairly simple shot, and they ran through it a few times: Massee and Kelly and the other thugs have broken into the loft and are attempting to rape Eric's girlfriend, played by Sofia Shinas. They're fondling her breasts...the door opens. Lee walks in unexpectedly, carrying a bag of groceries. (Implanted in the bag is a squib, a small explosive device used to simulate a bullet hitting its mark.) Massee whips out his pistol, wheels around in a drunken stagger, fires off a shot...Lee falls to his knees



and then tumbles forward, his face toward the camera. Kelly runs over to Lee's body, improves a few lines of outrage, and the scene ends. Maybe two minutes of action, total. Usually in rehearsals, a fake gun is used while the real one is kept locked up until it's needed. But on *The Crow*, they cheated a little, perhaps just to save time. Massee was rehearsing with the real gun, a beautiful silver .44 magnum with a white handle.

Massee  
was rehearsing  
with the real gun,  
a beautiful silver .44  
magnum with  
a white  
handle.

After the first run-through, there was a little debate between Lee and director Alex Proyas. This was the first American feature for Proyas, an Australian known for his slick, atmospheric commercials and music videos, and he wanted every detail right. Lee worried that his character would be able to hear his girlfriend's screams, so they decided he should be wearing a Walkman.

Finally, they were ready to go. Daniel Kuttner, the prop master, went out to Massee, carrying a plastic bag full of blanks. He took the gun from Massee, and, in a lapse that may haunt him for the rest of his life, he neglected to check the gun barrel for obstructions. Perhaps it was another little cheat to save time. Maybe it was inexperience or even fatigue. Kuttner loaded the .44 magnum with a single blank shell, then snapped the cylinder closed.

"Okay, everybody, full load!" he yelled, alerting all present that the blank had as much gunpowder as a real bullet. Anyone who had any experience with guns on movie sets would have known that this was a dangerous amount of explosive to use at such close range--Lee would be maybe twelve feet from the end of the barrel when the shot was fired--but no one raised an objection. It was the final lapse in a tragic series of mistakes and misjudgments, setting the stage for what was to come.

Steve Andrews, the first assistant director, yelled, "Quiet on the set!"

"Rolling!"

"Action!"

The scene played out exactly as it had in rehearsals. The commotion of the actors on the set...the door opening...Lee stepping into the room...Massee

turning around, staggering, a wild look in his eye, pulling the gun out of his belt. He did not take careful aim. In fact, he may well have intended to aim a few inches to Lee's side. But the scene was so quick and he was so off-balance that he just pointed the gun in Lee's direction and pulled off a shot. There was a flash in the muzzle and a terrific bang, amplified by the cavernous set.

As planned, Lee detonated the squib and the groceries went flying. Except this time, Lee didn't fall forward. He spun around and doubled over, his hand grabbing his stomach. He winced and crumpled to the floor, his head wedged against the door. Kelly approached him, as he had in rehearsal, looked him over, and then shouted back at Massee, improvising, "Oh, man, you fuck, you shot him! Now what are we going to do? You stupid fuck, man!"

The scene was chaotic, with Kelly pacing back and forth, ranting, Shinas screaming, one of the thugs trying to shush her. Lee motioned with his arm, trying to signal his distress, but everyone was too involved in the action to notice. He ended up on his left side, his feet facing the camera. One crew member remembers thinking, "That's strange, that's totally different than the way he did it in rehearsal." Others just thought it was extraordinarily good acting. One person who was on the set would later remember hearing a faint call from Lee as he lay clutching his belly on the floor: "Cut, cut, somebody please say cut..." But at the time, too much was happening too quickly for it to register.

Finally Proyas yelled, "Cut!"

The chaos subsided. But unlike in the rehearsals, Lee did not get up. He just lay there with his head against the door, his chin on his chest, eyelids barely open. Clyde Baisey, the medic on the set, rushed to his side: "Brandon, are you all right? Brandon?"

Suddenly, the set was dead quiet. Artifice was peeled away, and reality seeped in. At that moment, says one crew member, "we all knew that something had gone very, very wrong."

*The Crow* was going to be Lee's big break. Even before the movie was completed, he was gearing up



for the publicity machine: photo shoots, phone interviews, chats with journalists visiting the set. This was going to be his moment, and he knew it.

That is not to say *The Crow* wasn't a risky venture. This was a strange, cartoonish horror flick that didn't fit into any neat category—no one really knew what it would do at the box office. But it did have Ed Pressman, one of the most respected independent producers in Hollywood, behind it, as well as Paramount Pictures, which had signed on to distribute the film. The screenplay—based on a comic book by James O'Barr, who wrote it after his girlfriend died in a car accident—was written by sci-fi novelist John Shirley and by David J. Schow, horror novelist and champion of the splatterpunk genre.

Lee first read the script last summer and lobbied hard for the part. But Pressman's first choice was Christian Slater. When Slater passed, Pressman took another look at Lee. It didn't hurt that he came comparatively cheap—he was promised \$750,000, plus a small percentage of the gross (considerably less than Slater's going rate). Lee was so enthusiastic about *The Crow*, he'd signed on for two sequels.

Eight years old when his father died, Lee spent most of his life trying to come to terms with a man he hardly knew. Speculation still whirls about Bruce Lee's sudden death, but most people who were close to him (including his widow, Linda Lee Cadwell) accept the autopsy findings that death was caused by brain swelling due to an allergic reaction to a painkiller. Whatever the cause, it hit young Brandon hard: "To explain to this child that the hero of his life could no longer come home was incomprehensible to him," Linda wrote in her book, *Bruce Lee: The Man Only I Knew*, which later became the basis for the movie *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*.

For Brandon, it was not easy being the fatherless son of a legendary fighter. "When I was growing up, we moved around a lot, and whenever I'd get to a new school, there'd be somebody there trying to kick my ass," Lee said last year. But his desire to become an actor like his father never wavered, and after he finally graduated from high school (he'd

dropped out twice), he studied drama at Emerson College in Boston and then took acting lessons in Manhattan. He was intent on becoming a serious actor.

The screenplay  
was based on a  
comic book by James  
O'Barr, who wrote it  
after his girlfriend  
died.

Still, it seemed that everywhere Lee went, he was immediately pigeonholed as Bruce Lee's son. He finally gave in to the inevitable. In 1985 he made *Kung Fu: The Movie*, a TV film with David Carradine. Then in '87 came his first martial arts feature, *Legacy of Rage*, in Hong Kong (entirely in Cantonese, which he spoke fluently). Next he did *Laser Mission* ('89) and then *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, with Dolph Lundgren. "While we were shooting *Little Tokyo*," recalls Pat Johnson, fight coordinator on the movie and a long-time friend of the Lee family, "Brandon said to me, 'You know, for years I was in my father's shadow, and I resented it. I wanted to be an actor, not do martial arts films. But it finally dawned on me—I am who I am, and I might as well accept it. Once I realized that, doors started to open for me. I'll go in and do what they ask of me, and I'll use it to get to the kind of movies that I want to make.'"

*Little Tokyo* wasn't exactly a smash, but it got him a toehold in the business. And after so much struggle, he wasn't shy about flaunting his success a little: with his first paycheck, Lee bought himself an \$80,000 Acura NSX sports car. Later that year, he met Eliza Hutton, who was working for director Renny Harlin at the time and who later became a story editor for Stillwater Productions, Kiefer Sutherland's company. Lee was immediately smitten, and the two were soon very much in love.

*Rapid Fire*, released in August 1992, was Lee's first starring role and yet another step up the ladder. He signed a three-picture deal with Twentieth Century Fox, then plunged into a worldwide publicity tour to promote the movie. "He was living for this," one friend says. All the attention was a kind of vindication, the escape from his father's shadow that he'd coveted for so long.

Amid all the excitement, Lee and Hutton made their wedding plans. On April 17, just after *The Crow* was to have wrapped, they were going to head off to Ensenada, Mexico, to get married on the beach at sunset.



By Thanksgiving, most of the casting of *The Crow* was finished, and a production office was open in Wilmington. The Carolco lot isn't exactly a vision of Hollywood glamour. On a road lined with empty office buildings and industrial warehouses on the outskirts of town, it could easily be mistaken for the local UPS distribution center.

"Wilmington is a place to engage in the process of filmmaking unencumbered by unions, by bureaucracy," says Craig Fincannon of Fincannon & Associates, who did some of the casting for *The Crow*.

Translation: it's a place to make movies cheap, the Hollywood equivalent of making tennis shoes in Taiwan. While many workers in Wilmington are as highly trained as their brethren in New York and L.A., North Carolina is a right-to-work state, no unions necessary. Wages are lower, work rules relaxed, and there are no expensive fringe benefits to pay. Producers can save 20 to 30 percent on labor costs. It's one of the big reasons why North Carolina was second in film production revenues in the United States in 1990, pumping more than \$400 million into the local economy. Some 50 features have been shot there since 1983, including *Super Mario Bros.* and the forthcoming *Hudsucker Proxy*. And with the current trend in Hollywood toward independent films, the whole place is beginning to smell like a boomtown.

But for many in Wilmington who make their living in the movie business, it's a mixed blessing. They all know the main reason producers come here is that it's cheap and workers have no recourse against demands for long hours and low wages. "You know that sometimes you're being exploited," says one Wilmington veteran. "But nobody wants to stand up and say anything about it for fear of scaring business away." Attempts at unionizing have been rebuffed. "The real problem is that people down there believe that if they start to demand higher wages and better working conditions," says Bryan Unger, an organizer for the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees in New York, "they'll stop making movies there. And that ain't necessarily so." (This same fear, in fact, is the reason most crew members on the production declined to be quoted by name for this article.)

They wanted  
to make a \$30 million  
movie, but they wanted  
to spend \$12  
million to  
do it.

Like many movies, *The Crow* brought in its own crew for the top-level jobs but saved money by giving inexperienced people their first break, a common practice on nonunion shoots. The theory behind it is that the crew people will be so grateful for the opportunity, they won't say no to anything. For example, art director Simon Murton recommended his friend Daniel Kuttner to be the prop master. Kuttner, 28, was an eager, hardworking guy but with considerably less experience than is usually needed for a complicated production like this. Kuttner, in turn, hired his girlfriend, a former set dresser and sound person named Charlene Hamer, as his assistant.

When the production got to North Carolina, the roster was filled out primarily with nonunion locals; grips, gaffers, camera assistants, etc. Adopting another common practice on nonunion shoots, they tried to save additional money by short-crewing. Some of it was just penny-pinching. For example, instead of having one stand-in for every actor in a scene, they rarely had more than two on the set at a time. Sometimes they came close to flouting the widely accepted guidelines of Hollywood's Industrywide Safety Committee: for instance, instead of paying for a full second camera unit at union scale, they let some assistants do it on the sly.

"They wanted to make a \$30 million movie," says one crew member who quit a few weeks into the shoot, "but they only wanted to spend \$12 million to do it."

On February 1, the first day of shooting, things got off to an ominous start. While working up in the bucket of a crane on the back lot, a carpenter named Jim Martishius accidentally backed into some high-tension wires, suffering severe burns on his face, arms, and chest. The mood on the set sank even lower, according to observers, when word got around that in the midst of the turmoil, production manager Grant Hill was less than tactful about asking a crew member whether they would have electricity for the rest of the day.

Of course, long hours and miserable conditions are nothing new on movie sets, but even for the grizzled veterans, this was a grueling shoot. The story



itself was so bleak. And because they were shooting at night in the middle of winter, often with forced rain, it was always dark, wet, cold. Sleep habits were disturbed; people became frazzled, disoriented. To make matters worse, director Proyas was impossible to satisfy. Although his rough Aussie wit charmed some, his inability to make decisions drove the camera crew nuts.

Morale plummeted. Cast and crew were spending twelve, fourteen hours a day on the set and then coming back the next morning with only an eight- or nine-hour break. No one felt the pressure more than Kuttner and Hamer. Jim Moyer, a local firearms specialist, had been brought in for a week during which most of the weapons used were automatics, but the rest of the time, the handguns were left to Kuttner and Hamer—along with every other prop, from cigarettes to silverware. Understaffed and overworked, they often spent their days shopping for upcoming scenes, leaving little time for sleep. When a crew member noticed Kuttner “running around like a madman” one night, he asked him why they didn’t hire someone to help with the shopping. “Danny just shrugged and said, ‘No money in the budget.’”

Not surprisingly, little accidents started happening. One crew member jammed a screwdriver through his hand. A stuntman, who had worked nine hours straight, fell wrong during a sword fight on a roof, got caught on the roof’s edge, and broke a couple of ribs. “You work that much for that many weeks in a row, safety is the first thing to go,” says a crew member about the production in general.

But despite the dangers, no one on the crew complained. “If you tried,” another crew member adds, “they would have looked at you and said, ‘So where are you working tomorrow?’” No one wanted to risk being labeled a troublemaker.

The only thing that kept them going was that the dailies were terrific. Lee was superb, and the dark, weird look that they were all suffering so much to achieve was coming to life up on the screen.

But the pressure got turned up another notch when, about a week before Lee’s death, Film Fi-

It's one of  
Hollywood's dirty  
little secrets that  
cocaine is often the  
stimulant of choice  
on tough  
shoots.

nances, the completion bond company, started visiting the set. That in itself is not unusual, but for this beaten-down crew, it just made matters worse. That week was the toughest of the shoot, as they were working in an old cement factory on the outskirts of town, where every step kicked up a mouthful of lung-choking dust. There were lots of stunts, explosions, and automatic weapons firing in every scene. The camera assistants put in 90 hours on the set that week.

It's one of Hollywood's dirty little secrets that cocaine is often the stimulant of choice on tough shoots. On *The Crow*, “it was so obvious, it got to be a running joke,” says a crew member. “One night, we were at the cement factory when someone sneezed. A friend of mine said, ‘Whoops, there goes 50 bucks.’ The guy said, ‘Yep.’” Some crew members noticed that others would disappear briefly from the set at 3 or 4 A.M. and return wiping their noses, full of energy. The behavior further alienated an already highly demoralized crew. Wilmington is in the middle of the Bible Belt, after all, where drug use—or even the perception of drug use—is not taken lightly. That Saturday, four days before he died, Lee called Jan McCormack, his manager and one of his closest friends. “He told me that for seven or eight days straight, he had had next to no sleep,” McCormack recalls. “He said, ‘Jan, I can hardly talk, I’m so tired.’ He said conditions on the set had become subhuman. That was the word he used: subhuman.”

On Monday, McCormack and Mike Simpson, Lee’s agent at William Morris, called Ed Pressman to lodge a complaint. Pressman told them to call producer Robert Rosen, who was in charge of the production in Wilmington. Rosen was abrupt with them, says McCormack, arguing that they had a movie to finish and were pulling out all the stops to get it done.

“So I said to him, ‘Bob, I don’t care about your damn movie. You guys are killing Brandon down there,’” McCormack recalls, her voice welling up with emotion. “I didn’t mean it to be prophetic.”

When Lee was shot, he fell against the only door on the set. To get out, the crew had to file past the



barely conscious actor, his face a pale grayish color. There was no blood on the floor, just some spilled milk from the grocery bag. One crew member recalls looking down at his wound as she walked past: "I'll never forget what it looked like—it was eye-shaped, about an inch below his belly button on his right side. There was blood pooling behind the wound but nothing pouring out. It just looked like a tear in the skin."

Outside, the crew waited in the darkness for the ambulance—there was no real sense of danger yet. Most thought it was just a squib that had misfired and torn into his flesh like a piece of shrapnel. One crew member remembers seeing Massee, the actor who pulled the trigger: "He was in shock. I don't think he knew what happened."

It only took a few minutes for the ambulance to arrive. When they brought Lee out on the gurney, it suddenly hit home: this was no flesh wound. Paramedics were putting inflatable trousers around Lee's legs to keep blood pressure steady and had inserted a tracheal tube, and set medic Baisey was giving him CPR (later crew members would learn Lee's heart had stopped once on the set and a second time on the way to the hospital). Still, a lingering faith remained.

When the ambulance left, the crew dispersed. About 30 people went to New Hanover Regional Medical Center and waited in the emergency room, trying to hold it together, hoping that their collective energy would give their friend strength. They waited around until morning, when a doctor finally came out and told them he had done what he could, but that the object—he didn't say bullet—was lodged against Lee's spine. It had severed a major artery and severely damaged internal organs, and he had lost a tremendous amount of blood. It didn't look good.

Lee's close friend, stunt coordinator Jeff Imada, immediately flew to Atlanta to meet Hutton, who was coming in from L.A. and had no idea how badly her fiancée was hurt. Gently, Imada broke the news to her that Lee's injury was much more serious than they had at first realized. Only three days earlier, Hutton had been laughing with friends as she

Instead of waiting for professional dummies, they made their own, using live ammunition.

opened gifts at her bridal shower at the posh Hotel Bel-Air, looking forward to building a new life with Lee. Now that life was about to end. When they landed in Wilmington around noon, Imada took her directly to the hospital where Lee was in intensive care. An hour later, he was dead.

The next morning, Lee's body was taken to the nearby city of Jacksonville for an autopsy. The results were released that afternoon at a press conference at the Wilmington police station. The big news: a bullet had been found. Instantly, a storm of speculation raged through the press and brought journalists flying in from all over the world. Variety quoted Lee's publicist as calling for a murder investigation, and the New York Post headline screamed: THE GUN WAS LOADED. Was the Chinese mob involved? Or was there a second gunman, perhaps a sniper, in the rafters? It was tabloid heaven.

But the crew knew otherwise. Over the next few days, the details of what happened began to emerge. It started three weeks earlier, when the second unit needed the gun and six rounds of dummy bullets—that is, bullets that look like the real thing but have no powder inside—for close-ups. It was a routine request. Except that the prop department didn't have any dummies for the .44 magnum. Instead of waiting till the next day to track down professionally made dummies at a local prop shop, Kuttner and Imada, along with Bruce Merlin, the special effects lead man, decided to make their own, using live ammunition that Imada had in his trunk. Merlin pulled the live bullets apart with pliers, emptied out the powder, and jammed them back together. Because, unlike real dummies, these contained a residue of powder along with a live primer, after loading the gun, one of them fired it several times to discharge the primers. Except somehow, when the gun was sent to the second unit, one of the primers was still live.

It was not yet a tragic oversight. Ordinarily on a movie like this, the gun would have been transported to the second unit by an experienced prop person who was responsible for its care and safekeeping. But on *The Crow*, there was no such person. The gun was lent out like a teapot or a watch and taken to the second unit by visual effects consultant



Andrew Mason, who handed it to the camera operator and disappeared.

The camera shot the closeup looking straight down the gun barrel—just a quick flash for the final sequence to show the cylinder turning and the hammer going down. While they were setting up for the shot, the stand-in squeezed the trigger a few times to get comfortable with the gun. He later recalled hearing a little pop and alerting the camera operator. But since neither was a weapons expert, neither knew what to make of it. In fact, this was the fatal moment: one of the primers had gone off in the dummy, igniting the residue of gunpowder, which caused just enough of an explosion to propel the bullet partway down the barrel and lodge it there. (For ballistic reasons, the barrel of a gun is slightly smaller than the bullet.) An experienced gun handler would undoubtedly have understood what the sound meant, looked down the barrel, and spotted the dislodged bullet.

The shot proceeded as planned. At one point, the camera operator reportedly noticed one of the tips was missing and asked the stand-in to rotate the cylinder so the camera wouldn't pick it up. Yet again, it was a detail that would immediately have alarmed anyone who knew guns. Instead, the shot was completed, the gun emptied, and no one mentioned the missing tip. Gun and bullets were returned to the prop truck.

Still, Lee's death was not yet a foregone conclusion. Guns are usually cleaned whenever they are returned to the prop truck. But because the gun had not actually been fired, Kuttner and Hamer saw no reason to bother. Several weeks later, when Hamer went to get the gun off the prop truck on that fatal night, she opened the pouch in which the gun was kept and a single dummy bullet tumbled out. Not thinking anything of it, and in a rush as usual, she checked the cylinder—but not the barrel—and handed it to Massee for rehearsal. At this point, the four other dummies and the empty casing were still in the pouch, which Hamer placed on the prop cart.

A few minutes later, Kuttner arrived on the set with the blanks. He noticed the gun pouch on the cart

The shot  
was completed, the  
gun emptied, and no  
one mentioned the  
missing tip.

and even noticed that one of the casings was missing a tip. Perhaps he recalled that the gun had been to the second unit several weeks earlier, but surely if they'd had any problems, he would have heard—he was only a radio call away. But apparently no one had said a word. Perhaps if all five dummies plus the single casing had been in the pouch, he would have understood. Instead, he took the gun from Massee and loaded it with the blank. Unbeknownst to him, the bullet tip was still in the barrel, just waiting to be fired into Lee's belly.

"This accident is like the sinking of the Titanic," says Ron Greenwood, a veteran Hollywood prop master. "So many things went wrong, and there was so much negligence, as to defy belief."

Lee was buried on Saturday, April 3, at Lake View Cemetery in Seattle, next to his father. The following day, Lee's friends collected at the Los Angeles home of Polly Bergen, with whom Lee used to play backgammon. The family was there, including Lee's mother, who told guests she wanted the gathering to be "a celebration of Brandon's life." Three hundred or so attended, including people he'd known in the martial arts world and a few celebrities like Kiefer Sutherland and Steven Seagal. Friends told funny stories about Lee, trying to keep the mood upbeat. Imada and Hutton, however, were too broken up to speak.

An anguished Imada told one guest, "I just keep seeing it over and over again."

Pressman and Rosen both attended, stony-faced and solemn. At one point, Rosen approached McCormack and offered his condolences. "I don't have any words to console you," he said.

Indeed he did not. For those who were close to Lee, the long process of coming to terms with his sudden death was just beginning. It seemed impossible that a man so strong and so in love and so hopeful about the future was gone. "I am full of rage," McCormack says. "Some days the sorrow suppresses the rage, some days the rage suppresses the sorrow." For her, the most difficult thing to grasp is the senselessness of Lee's death. "It is so



awful and so stupid," she says. "It's one thing if he'd died doing a dangerous stunt, falling off a building or something. It is another to die walking through a door, carrying an armful of groceries."

Now the finger pointing begins. "Brandon Lee's death was the result of ignoring basic and well-recognized safety guidelines," says District Attorney Jerry Spivey, who may bring criminal charges against one or more members of the crew, depending on what the investigation concludes. As of this writing, the DA was considering charges of criminal negligence against the entire production company. The insurance company, the completion bond company, and the state Occupational Safety and Health Administration are all conducting their own investigations. In the flurry of lawsuits that are bound to erupt, there will undoubtedly be many attempts to rewrite history, to paper over the details. Many crew members fear that one person is going to take the fall, when they all know, given the abuses that occurred on the set, that everyone is guilty, from the top down. As one crew member puts it: "It's like the classic question in a murder trial: who is more responsible, the person who pulled the trigger, or the one who ordered it?"

Many in Wilmington, proud of their hard-won skills in the movie business, are afraid that Lee's death is going to put a stigma on their town—even though none of the people directly involved in the incident were locals. In the weeks following Lee's death, rumors were flying that the next production had already been scared off, that the livelihood of local film crews would soon dry up. The unions have

Pistols  
shouldn't be viewed  
as props, in the same  
category as watches,  
ashtrays and hair-  
brushes.

tried to use this accident—and the subsequent publicity about the lack of safety on nonunion productions—as a way to gain a foothold in North Carolina. So far, they haven't had much success.

But if nothing else, Lee's death has changed the way people think about guns on movie sets (motivated, at least in part, by a fear that insurance rates will skyrocket). Most firearms experts agree that there should be better gun education for actors. They are ultimately the ones who hold the weapon, who pull the trigger—and so it is up to them to make sure it's safe. Also, every show should have an armorer, a person explicitly in charge of all weaponry. Pistols shouldn't be viewed as props, in the same category as watches and ashtrays and hairbrushes.

But most important of all, Lee's death may give people the courage to raise their voices against excessive cost cutting and whip cracking on movie sets. "Hopefully, what happened to Brandon will make it easier for crew members to stand up to producers and say, 'This is not safe,'" says John Perkinson, a veteran Wilmington camera assistant. "And if the producer keeps pushing, all we have to say is, 'Brandon Lee.'"

There is one final eerie twist to this tragic story. The last couple of scenes of *The Crow* were scheduled to be completed in early June, reportedly using a double for Lee. If the movie ever does get released, according to the shooting script, the first image of Brandon Lee we will see is of the young actor in his grave, kicking mightily, trying to break out.

Economist Newspaper Ltd. (England) 1991

National martyrs make good propaganda, but, as Chinese officials have been discovering, they do not always make good films. Some 16 billion cinema tickets were sold in China last year, but it was bandits and pimps, not revolutionary heart-throbs, that the public was queuing to see. Even when seats were filled for stirring tales from the past, the desired message was not always getting through. The film *Jiao*

*Yulu* is a case in point.

*Jiao Yulu* is the story of a perfect party member. It is moving, and it has out, sold all its rivals; but the hero died almost 30 years ago. Now the search is on for more modern socialist saints, but these are proving difficult to come by. Most Chinese see today's cadres as contented time-servers with their fingers in every corrupt pie. Filmmakers are therefore having to try a bit harder, and look in different places, to find the commu-

nist role models of the 1990s.

The old-style heroes used to be ordinary proletarians. Now they have pulled rank: they are members of the police, soldiers in the army, or higher-level cadres plotting the success of China's economic reforms (as in *Hello Pacific*, and the tantalisingly-named *Female Workers in the Special Zone*).

Not all script-writers have got the formula right.



ASIAFILM #41: WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY 何美, AMY HARLB, 212 W 21 ST #2N  
NY, NY 10011 (212) 989-8217.

HAPPY NEW YEAR! YEAR OF THE DOG 4692. LAST YEAR WAS THE WORST EVER  
FOR ME FOR THE LEAST AMOUNT OF PERFORMANCES, NOV - ONE, DEC - ONE, JAN - ONE.  
I HOPE THE DOG WILL BE BETTER FOR ME THAN THE LAST YEAR'S ROOSTER.

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ASSOCIATE PRODUCER VIRGINIA LOK SCREENPLAY BY LEE YING KIT  
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL MAK

← HERE'S SOME  
GOOD CINEMATIC  
THINGS I'VE SEEN  
SINCE LAST MAFFAPA.

## 'Sex and Zen': Outrageous Look at the Perils of Excess

By KEVIN THOMAS  
Los Angeles Times

The amusingly titled "Sex and Zen" (now playing) concentrates lots more on the former than on the latter, which is saved for the very last.

An elegant and erotic comedy adapted from Li Yu's Ming Dynasty novel "The Carnal Prayer Mat," it is strictly for ultra-sophisticated adults and is an exceedingly deft blend of outrageous sex and equally outrageous humor.

Without our realizing what is happening, this singularly sly film gradually evolves from sex farce to cautionary tale underlined by increasingly dark humor. In short, its libertine hero, Mei Yang (Lawrence Ng), proves to have more in common with St. Augustine than we would have ever suspected.

No sooner has the handsome, rakish Mei Yang awakened his beautiful but comically reluctant bride, Yuk Heung (Amy Yip), to the pleasures of sex than he abandons her for a life of determined womanizing.

When a mentor tells him that he isn't properly equipped for such a career, he submits to primitive transplant surgery in a sequence of brilliantly sustained hilarity. Thus armed, however, he succumbs to sex so compulsively that a day of reckoning could be lurking ahead—also for his having treated his wife with such total neglect.

As a period piece "Sex and Zen" is gorgeous-looking, as are its actresses, and director Michael Mak, working from Lee Ying Kit's script, flirts with but never quite lapses into hard-core territory while building up considerable steam.

Its heavy-duty sensuality, however, cannot distract us from the

# Sex and Zen

For Mature Adult Audience



cruelty and decadence of its era—a time when women were chattel without recourse to brutal husbands, when their only hope of self-defense was beauty combined with formidable sexual wizardry.

The film's contemporary sensibility, furthermore, allows us to see the vulnerable, self-destructive underside of extreme machismo. Indeed, "Sex and Zen," as hot as it is, is steeped in a sense of the absurdity of sex divorced from love or affection.

As a director, Mak must have a remarkable capacity for inspiring a trust in his actors that would permit them to appear in one uninhibited scene after another; to his credit, he never makes fools of them—and he furthermore gets terrific performances from them in the most potentially embarrassing situations.

"Sex and Zen"

(Times-rated Mature for sex and nudity) is a wise and risqué treat for the truly grown-up, but remember to leave the kids at home.

## THE EAST IS RED

(Hong Kong, 1993, 103 min., in Cantonese w/ English & Chinese subtitles) Dir. Tsui Hark. Starring Brigitte Lin, Joey Wang, Yu Rong-Guang

An absolutely mesmerizing genderbending action-adventure, *The East Is Red* the segment to *Swordsman II*, marks Brigitte Lin's unparalleled return to the screen as the androgynously sensual martial arts wizard, Asia the Invincible. Born as a man, but slowly transformed into a woman by the powers of a magic scroll, Asia has cursed the human world and retreated to the solitude of the Black Cliff. But when Spanish invaders threaten to plunder China, and usurpers of her name try to take power, Asia returns to destroy her enemies with a ferocious energy not known to mortal beings. Now completely female, she encounters her beloved concubine, Snow (Joey Wang), who is still leading Asia's Sun Moon Sect followers in her memory. The former lovers now find themselves at odds with one another, in a super-charged battle for domination, and the power to lead China out of dark feudal times.





## Wicked City

Directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri

**At midnight you** awaken, heart racing, throat dry. This is not the world you know, but one close by, separated by the width of a blade, the thickness of a scream. Cobblestones have the wet give of viscera, gutters flow with tears and bile, buildings reach desperately toward a blood umber sky, and ahead, a doorway like a maw beckons. Others have opened this portal—Barker, Bosch, Rbt. Williams, Basil Wolverton—they have glimpsed the horrors of the body and the rapture of the flesh, but not dared pass through.

Nor will you: that way madness lies. But surely some have, and returned? *Wicked City* (at Anjelika and Anjelika 57, midnights) might be evidence. Unlike others in its genre—and in Japan, Animated Supernatural Body Horror is a genre, a burgeoning one—*Wicked City* has a story to go with its crudescent imagery. (This summer's ASBH release, *Legend of the Overfiend*, was primarily an archive of ways that large, disgust-

ing bodies can tear their ways out of smaller bodies. Or into.) Taki is a member of the "Black Guard," a mystical security team that enforces the treaty struck centuries ago between our dimension and the inferno next door. The treaty's term is almost up, and Taki is assigned to protect the framer of the original agreement. His new partner: Maki, a woman of the Black World who has assumed a human form greatly resembling a Patrick Nagel print. Earlier, we're shown Taki being seduced by a different Black Worlder, whose postcoital transformation (imagine an overliteral reading of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*) leaves him aghast; still, as expected, shared danger enables Taki to overcome his prejudice and fall in love with Maki, this most Other of women. There isn't room to elaborate: suffice it to say that the *madonna ex machina* ending begs for a deconstruction along the axes of race and gender; meanwhile, the acting is adequate and the dub refreshingly free of mouth-flap syndrome—so there are no aural distractions to the visual overstimulus.

—JEFF YANG

## THERE IS A VIETNAMESE CINEMA HISTORY!

**S**peaking about Vietnam, one often thinks right away of war and poverty. Those facts are true. The war lasted 30 years from 1945 to 1975, and then there were border clashes in the South, West and in the North. One can say that the blood of the Vietnamese people stopped being shed only after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese army from Kampuchea in September 1989. And poverty is also an apparent fact. Just a few kilometers away from big cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, one can see farmers behind buffaloes and ploughs, who still work in the fields with primitive means of farming just like their ancestors have done for thousands of years. However, people have had to survive in such circumstances as war and poverty: boys and girls still are in love with each other, get married, bear children, bring them up and educate them. People still have to do normal work and to establish a culture, which succeeds their traditional culture, despite any historical changes. Under such conditions, there exists in this country cinema history that until recently only few foreigners knew about.

Cinema actually arrived here a long time ago, during French colonialism with the appearance of houses where movies from France were shown. In 1938, a group of students and intellectual called for each other to make movies played by Vietnamese and made in the Vietnamese language. The first movie had the title *Canh Dong Ma* (*The Ghost Field*) in which indoor scenes were shot, developed and printed in Hong Kong. The film was about a criminal case involving the love of a young couple in the city. After the war against France broke out in 1945, President Ho Chi Minh realized that cinema could become an efficient tool to encourage the war of resistance against France; therefore he put his best efforts into the building of the Vietnamese cinema. (It is worth remembering that during the 1920s when President Ho Chi Minh was in France as an activist, and as an experienced photographer, he once met Charlie Chaplin and admired him greatly.)

**M**any soldiers in the army who knew how to take pictures became posts, the ambushes on weapon convoys of the French army. Then, in primitive conditions, they developed and printed the films right in the jungle and showed them to the guerrillas and military units. These fragments of films had drawn deep admiration from the audience just like the first dump movies made by military had stirred the audience in Paris about one century ago. On March 1953 President Ho Chi Minh officially signed a decree to establish the Vietnam Cinema. That is the official birthday of Vietnamese cinema. From that day until now, the Vietnam Cinema has produced more than two hundred movies, thousands of documentaries and about a hundred animated cartoons.

—DANG NHAT MINH



DIRECTOR DANG NHAT MINH



Mark Jackson/2043 SE Isabell Road/ Port St. Lucie, Florida, 34952/  
407-337-2303.

Hello, Everyone,

Sometimes I dream.

When I saw BURKE'S LAW on cable tv a couple of years ago, I had a dream that the producer, Aaron Spelling, would bring it back (and I would have an opportunity to discuss aspects of the show that I failed to mention in my earlier review). With some updating, the basic format would be the same: Amos Burke, the chief of homicide for the Los Angeles Police Department would fit in with any cases that took place in Beverly Hills since he was a millionaire himself (and would enjoy the distinction of being driven to each crime scene in his own Rolls Royce). Each show would begin with an outlandish murder (e.g. a magazine publisher is killed by a bomb that blows his entire office free from the building). The extreme situation would create an air of unreality so the arrival of a millionaire chief of detectives would seem a natural turn of events.

The show was produced by a company called Four Star (named for the founders Charles Boyer, Dick Powell, Rosalind Russell and Joel McCrea). The latter two withdrew and David Niven joined but the company retained the four star name despite the fact there were only three people in charge. The company was founded in 1952 and, before it was taken over by a company called Filmways, they produced a variety of series from DICK POWELL THEATER to THE BIG VALLEY. Since they were a major production company, they could hire directors, composers and writers who were "top of the line" in their respective fields. The scripts were written by professionals such as Harlan Ellison. Herschel Burke Gilbert was the composer of the background score while TV directors such as George WaGgner (no misprint) lent their professional touch.

The pilot for BURKE'S LAW initially appeared as a 1962 episode of DICK POWELL THEATER with Powell portraying Amos Burke. By some incredible stroke of luck, I saw it in 1965 when a local TV station needed an hour to fill so I can only go on memory but the plot was wrapped so tightly that I can remember enough detail to review it today.

Powell portrayed Burke with his customary droll persona. He even got away with wearing a "stovepipe" silk hat. Still, he did not have the elan that Barry brings to Amos Burke. But I am getting ahead of myself. In the pilot, and the following series, Burke was close to forty so a relatively younger actor would have to be cast as a detective lieutenant to appeal to viewers in their twenties. The "young detective" in the pilot was portrayed by Dean Jones (who would later star in such Disney films as THAT DARN CAT and THE LOVE BUG). The pilot had eccentric characters but it did not have the "reach for the extreme" that characterized the series. The plot concerned the pursuit of a murder suspect whom the sole witness, a blind woman, knew as "George Edwards." Since she could identify the killer only through the sound of his voice, the case takes an unexpected turn when "the young detective" assists in a "voice line up" to test the



witness' ability to identify the killer and she names him as the culprit. Despite that setback, Burke pursues the case to a logical resolution through a plot that reflects the talent of the creator of that series. He was Frank D. Gilroy who would eventually write the Pulitzer Prize winning play "The Subject Was Roses" (which was filmed with Martin Sheen and Patricia Neal).

Powell passed away within a year after filming the pilot so, in the inevitable shake up, Gene Barry was cast as Amos Burke while an actor named Gary Conway (who would later appear as the lead in the series LAND OF THE GIANTS) was cast as "the young detective." While on the balance each episode was an excellent mystery, the completely cerebral approach of the pilot was de-emphasized to include excellently choreographed fight scenes and shoot outs.

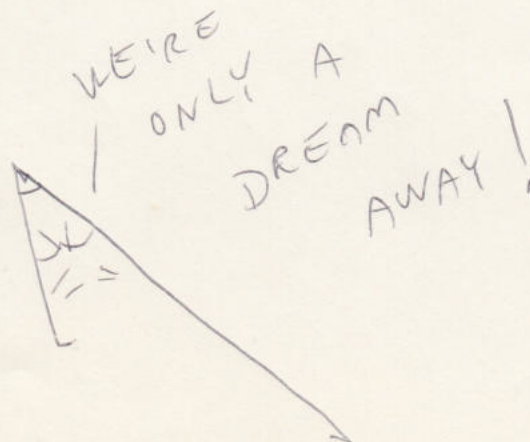
If we were going to have an updated BURKE'S LAW, our friend Amos would probably have been married by this time so we would have an actor portraying his son to attract viewers from the "younger" side of the demographic scale. Since Burke and the actor portraying him, Gene Barry, would be hitting seventy, I don't know if we could see the shoot outs and fight scenes we saw in the series so we would probably wind up with the slower pace of the pilot. There might be an impetus to release episodes from the old series on video so we could see examples of American approaches to "action filmmaking" vis-a-vis television and compare them with TV programs from other countries.

I think if Spelling kept to the original formula for the series: high profile guest stars and well developed sub plots that would occur during the investigation (e.g. "the young detective" falls for a suspect or Burke investigates the killer of his favorite instructor from the Police Academy) he might have another successful run for the show. The reason the show was cancelled initially was that it was changed in title and format to AMOS BURKE SECRET AGENT (the least said, the better). Which leads me to the question: if a concept works, e.g. THE FUGITIVE or THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, why not keep it going? Why can't we have another run for BURKE'S LAW?

Oh, well. Sometimes dreams can come true.

On the writing front, I have planted a number of seeds and I am waiting to see what will grow. On January 24, my doctor officially declared the radial keratotomy a success and released me from his care. He said "I want to see you in another year." I told him I planned to be here.

Good luck 'till next time!





Random ramblings I typed up while waiting to recover from the worst flu I've had in years. by Damon Foster; January, 1992

Here it be; the year 1994. Before going into detail about my first project of the year, I thought I'd give my opinions of 1993. It was the year I completed **AGE OF DEMONS**, my most successful video yet, the one where I almost broke even. It's somewhat successful, but I'd hoped for more, seeing as all the hard work put into it, not to mention the severe injuries which resulted in hefty doctor bills. I got to meet & interview HK actor Anthony Houk (**DRAGON FROM RUSSIA**, **OUTLAW BROTHERS**) and learned lots about the HK film industry. '93 also saw completion of **ORIENTAL CINEMA #15**, the final edition of OC the fanzine, because in 1994, it officially becomes a real magazine, sold in stores nationally.

It was also in 1993 that I appeared on Japanese TV for the second time, on the gameshow- I mean, on the lame show, **NARUHODO! THE WORLD** (as covered a while back). Far lesser known (I've never really mentioned it until now) was my being interviewed on the community access series "**Monster Attack Team**", by series founder Ed Holland (actor & producer of **HOT BUTTERED KUNG FU**; an 8mm short I trashed in OC#14, not knowing I'd later meet its maker!). The interview was silly, definately not the high point of Ed's trip out here to California. In LA, he got on the sets of **MIGHTY MORPHING**

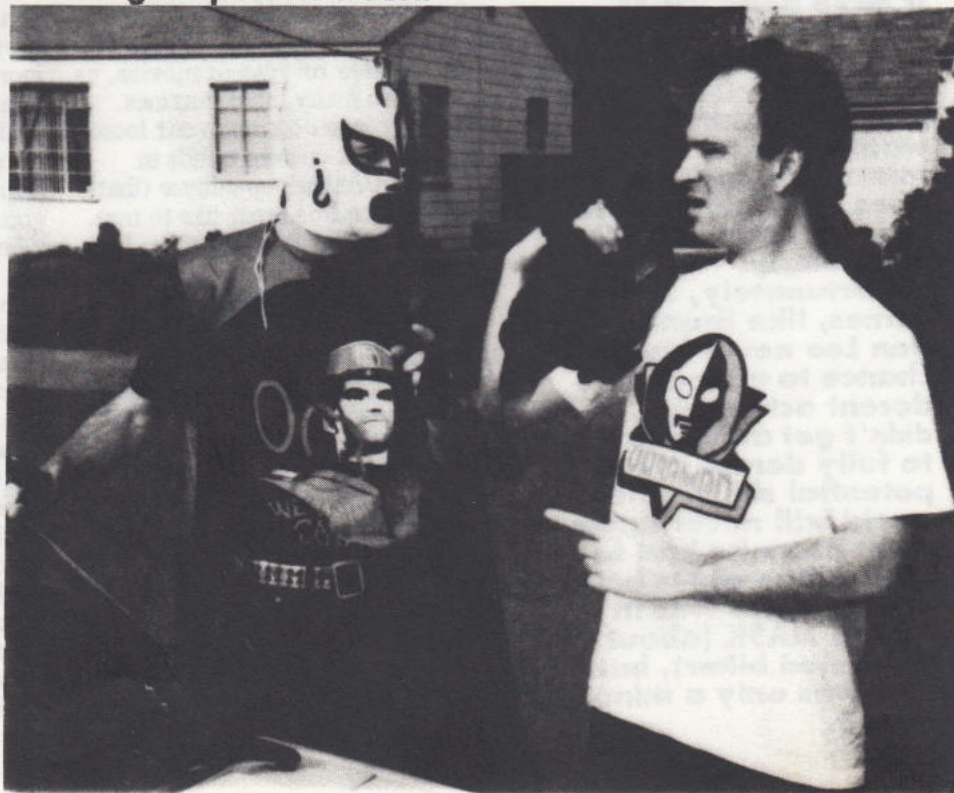
### **POWER RANGERS and ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO!**

I've worked on several other projects and articles through out 1993 too, making it a good year for me. But I see 1993 was an exciting year for other Mafappans; according to your articles, many of you read some nice books.

On the downside of 1993, excessive negative mail from SC Dacy forced me to sever all contact with this supposed moviemaker and self-proclaimed HK film expert. I decided he's probably a good person for me to avoid, so I send all his mail back unopened. Yet the guy is determined to get my attention! I still receive unsolicited material from him, which I naturally write "Return To Sender" on. Seems any intelligent person would



PHOTOS: Above: **Mysteron** (right) is unafraid of Butch's attack. Below: **DF** directing our hero behind the scenes.







know when to give up, it's his stamps he's wasting! Among other things, he sent me the tragic news one of the worst things to happen in 1993. Martial arts actor Steve James (AMERICAN NINJA) died of pancreatic cancer on the evening of December 18, 1993. He was a fan of Asian films & TV, an avid reader of OC, and a friend of mine. Despite his tough image in films, he was one hell of a nice guy. I debated sending this card back to Dacy with the note "Why couldn't it have been you?" scribbled on it. But Steve's untimely death made me miserable enough, I didn't want to add to the misery by opening the lines of communication to somebody I dislike so strongly. Unfortunately, Steve James, like Brandon Lee never had a chance to appear in a decent action film, so he didn't get an opportunity to fully demonstrate his potential skills. The world will never know what more he had to offer. One of his better appearances was in the drama MASK (about a deformed biker), but that was only a minor cameo.

**And now for my comments to other Mafappans, about the previous edition. I've noticed that some of the rest of you do this, making personal notes or advice for fellow Mafappans. I've never done this, because my criticisms might hurt somebody's feelings. But I decided 'what the hell!' A little constructive advice never hurt anyone. God knows I've received my share of it (usually in regards to OC or my many action videos), so now, for once, it's my turn to be the commentator.**

Laurine White- Does anybody actually give a damn about reviews of novels? I tend to skip most of your paragraphs, and scan for names of movies, or other things of interest to me. To each his own, I suppose, I'm certain some people skip my column altogether. Regardless, on the whole, your constant book reviews prove that you cater to a diverse crowd, and is actually a refreshing change from endless reviews of movies, as done in so many other fanzines. So I hope you continue your loose overviews of current trends in American/Asian pop culture (that's what your intros seem like to me). I hope maybe you could place less emphasis on novels, and more on other little known Asian facts, like in your letter to me where you mentioned a ninjas appearing in that old (1950s) John Wayne film, and on BARNABY JONES. And as someone completely uninterested in book reviews, I was wondering where you draw the line. Do you review Chinese cook books too?

Howard Walsdorf- Your updates on stars in Japan are interesting. I hope you can do more of this, and possibly shorten your accounts of

actual encounters with people who just happen to be Asian. Granted, there's an abundance of material available for all of us, on this subject. For example, just the other day, I was cut off on the road, by an Asian driver. Earlier, there was an oriental man in line at the supermarket, just two feet in front of me! However, I've found other things to write about. But again, the amount of info you dig up on Japanese TV stars is quite amazing though. Any chance you can find out about new superhero stars? Believe it or not, there's a growing fandom for this genre. One last thing, aren't you the guy in met in Japan Center a few years back? Laurine introduced me to someone who took my picture, was that you? If so, I'd appreciate a copy of the photo, as it was taken when I still had hair.

Amy Harlib- Yes! Your submissions are my favorites (aside from mine) in MAFFAPA. It's intriguing yet intimidating to read articles written by someone with an ego which compares to my own. I regret me and you couldn't have that sword duel to the death in HOT DOGS ON THE RUN, as planned many moons ago. As for MAFFAPA, I'm glad to read you're so into your creative projects, those stagershow look incredible. But please try to keep your writing away from the edge of the page! Half the time, it's off the page, and sometimes, the staples go through the words. If you have access to a typewriter or word processor, use it.

Robert Mallory- Looks to me like Laurine had a hell of a time trying to translate your handwritten article ("Clones of Bruce Lee") into legible type. Numerous errors (concerning actors and films) look like the results of confusion and difficulties in deciphering your chicken scratch into English. If nothing else, it gave me a good laugh, especially when she gave up the endless typing and just scribbled a big X over your 4th page! Robert, my old pal, invest in an old typewriter and plenty of



Liquid Paper. Otherwise, the article was excellent; as a movie commentator myself, this type of journalism is always educational to me. I hope you continue to write about old kung fu films.

Mark Jackson- First of all, unlike you, I'm no fan of MYSTERY SCIENCE whatever. They ridicule movies they think are cheap or really suck, when in fact any movie can be heckled and torn to shreds by a lame comedian and two talking vacuum cleaners (okay, one vacuum cleaner, one gumball machine; the point is, these jerks are in no position to label something else cheesie). I could easily find faults in 'classics' like CASABLANCA (yawn) and major money-makers (WAYNE'S WORLD; puke!). I happen to like GAMERA VS. GAOS, GODZILLA VS. MEGALON, Japan's STAR WOLF movies, and probably other movies they've bastardized. I could tolerate their semi-decent humor better if they'd show more respect for the films they mock, or if they'd present some actual facts or trivia. I realized they were idiots when a host announced the film WAR ON THE COLOSSAL BEAST! Yet somebody at this stupid show likes my work, as they've put me on their mailing list. Their newsletter is a load of crap, basically just an advertisement for their merchandise (T-shirts, etc.). I've never written to them. Their articles make no sense, talking about people & things I'm entirely unfamiliar with. Anyway, I'm not criticizing you for liking them or writing about them, but I thought I'd present an opposing viewpoint, to prove not everyone likes that series. One last thing, what the hell is that triangular thing you keep drawing!? A teepee? A cornucopia? Slice of pizza? Apple pie?

Damon Foster- You suck! Where do you get off criticizing everything but your own minor talents?!

Well, that's my reaction to

some of you people's work. The intention isn't to offend, but to say 'hi' in a DF sort of way. I'm just offering my opinion, and since everyone disagrees with me, you're all doing it right if I attack it! So keep up the good work, and don't take me seriously; I don't. So for now, on to my chosen topic.....

## DF VS. MYSTERON

How many times have you said to someone, "Another fine mess you've gotten me into?" That's what I kept saying to Barrie Evans, who, for the second time, got me involved in one of his notorious Mexican Wrestling romps. The first such event, where Johnny Legend hosted my match with El Santo and the Aztec Mummy, was reviewed in a previous edition. This new bout had me, Butch Portillo and August Ragone up against Mysteron (Barrie under yet another wrestling mask).

I must confess, my love of wrestling rivals my love of crab lice. The sight of Hulk Hogan is as appealing to me as a backed up toilet, and I really don't see what's so fun about watching two overweight, sweaty men (with I.Q.s far below what we'd consider humanly possible) rolling around in the ring, if somehow doesn't excite me. I like martial arts, not two fat morons wrapped around each other like San Franciscan salon owners.

However, wrestling freak Barrie Evans has always been helpful on my action/sci-fi videos,

so I felt obliged to lend a wrestling hand to his latest project. 'Twould appear to be part of some wrestling program for Community Access, what it's called only a serious wrestling fan would know. We supplied a five minute skit (I assume it appeared on one of their episodes) which took us seven hours to act, film, edit and audio dubb. Where the hell this show was broadcast may never be known. We did it on the first day of the new year; Jan. 1, 1994, (Saturday) from around 11:30am to 6:00pm. If nothing else, it was a productive way to start the new year.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MYSTERON begins like some no-budget soap opera or sitcom. Our masked wrestler (always under mask, his face is never seen) wakes up, showers, says good morning to his senile grandfather (also a masked wrestler) and goes outside. As filler before the climactic fight, Barrie threw in a gag or two; an using gimmicks involving a cat stuck in a tree, a goofy radio broadcast, a two Ren & Stimpy dolls, and the senile, muttering wrestler mentioned earlier. The finale has our hero on his way to work, in costume, but he happens upon a neighborhood robbery.

This battle between Mysteron and three thieves (me as their leader) came out okay, despite inevitable conflicts and creative differences.



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Happy Year of the Dog to all. Hope it's better than the recently departed Year of the Chook, the latter part of which was, for me, a real shit.

Bought a pack of instant noodles at a local Asian grocery simply because of the brand name - 'Ninja', which was a real hoot as they had nothing to do with anything a ninja traditionally would eat and were made in Thailand, to boot! They had chili and the usual Southeast Asian things in them but were tasty, at least.

### Films

Yearning (*Yume no onna*, Shochiku, 1993). This film, based on a novel by Nagai Kafu, directed by Bando Tamasaburo (the famous *onnagata*) and starring Yoshinaga Sayuri, was recently shown on SBS. Though a recent film (it was released in Japan in May) it was made in b/w deliberately in the style of the old, classic 'women's films' such as those by Mizoguchi.

The story is set in the early part of this century (rickshaws, telephones, blokes in kimonos and trilbies). The heroine is a courtesan, Kaede (real name Onami), who at the outset has her debts paid for her by one Mr Okabe to allow her to be independent at the place where she works. We later learn that three years before she had a baby girl, Otane, to a patron who died shortly thereafter. She had to give up Otane to adoption, leave Tokyo and return to her family in Okazaki. In order to continue to support them, she found she had to return to her old life in Tokyo.

There she met her former maid who told her that the folks who had adopted Otane had become neglectful and cruel once their own son had been born. Despite the expense of supporting the child on top of her parents and siblings and paying the maid to look after her, Kaede resolves to get the child away. These means she is unable to respond when Mr Okabe tells her he has lost everything and been disgraced and wants to live with her, even for a short time. She can't - she needs the money. He hangs himself and she gets the reputation of being an evil woman, thanks to a newspaper that must have been Tokyo's answer to the *National Inquirer*.

She starts a downhill slide into drink and despair as her customers, frightened, slip away. However, her maid gives her a pep talk - she's done nothing but suffer so far and she's still young. Her turn will come. And it does, in a way. She meets a middle-aged customer who is not bothered by her 'wicked woman' label and doesn't give a toss about her need to support her parents, siblings and child.

We see her again, eight years later. She has been set up in a restaurant and has come to her old stamping ground for a moon viewing at the urging of some of her restaurant customers. She confides to a second 'Kaede' she meets that she is still not happy in her life and can't be until she is free of supporting her parents and sister and she can spend her time fully with Otane, given up the restaurant and take up a respectable trade like a tobacco shop. She leaves without attending the party.

It was a beautifully shot film with lovely clear b/w photography and many scenes looked like paintings. It gave a very good idea of the demi-monde in Tokyo about 90 years ago. Yoshinaga Sayuri was appealing and effective in the central role. Of course, the story was a bit of a tear-jerker about the typical long-suffering Japanese woman who sacrifices all for the family and



others and is so much better than the menfolk around her (who are nearly all wimps), but it had style and the visuals made up for it.

The New Japanese, a 1991 documentary narrated by Richard Chamberlain (who looked a real seed with his moustache and check jacket) was shown on one of the commercial channels recently. This dealt with about seven different Japanese people to show something of the diversity of modern Japanese society.

We had a kindergarten teacher exploring an alternate lifestyle as a lead singer in an underground rock group; a salary man with the usual story of long hours, after office functions, commuting, etc. but who questioned why he had to work such long hours and not see his family (unlike when he was posted to the US); a kabuki actor, who, unlike the usual case, was not from a long line of kabuki actors but a *novus homo* trying to break in and achieving some success as an *onnagata*; an Ainu deer hunter who was part of a renaissance of Ainu culture and language; a trainee priest who had been a medical researcher who wanted to merge the spiritual with the scientific; the Emperor Akihito who brings a human face to the emperor system; a Toyota employee who was the most conventional of them all with loyalty to the company, company housing and high school, TQCs, etc. being discussed; an 'alternate school' set up in response to the education system pressure to help non-conformists and drop-outs by being more relaxed in its methods but still stressing the need to be part of a group; a fisherman who had returned from the city after 20 years to his native village and whose story reminded us that Japan was the number one fishing country and a young Shinto priest in rural Japan trying to stop the drift of farmers away from the land by trying to restore the spiritual side of farming life and the connection between the people and the land, and, more practically, encouraging side businesses not just rice-growing.

It was quite an interesting documentary despite Chamberlain's odd and affected pronunciation at times, though the usual clichés cropped up (groupism, homogeneity, the 'unknown' Ainu). It presented a diverse array of images regarding Japan and made the excellent point that: "Japan is made up of people not balance sheets." A common theme was individuals looking for something in their lives - some a different lifestyle from the accepted one, others a return to spirituality or their roots in their village or the land. The point was made that 'traditional culture' was no longer seen as the burden as it was in the 60s.

When Mrs Hegarty Comes to Japan was a 1992 documentary repeated on the ABC recently. It was made by Noriko Sekiguchi who also made *Senso daughters*. It was about her Australian 'mother', a woman she had known and stayed with on and off for the past 10 years. Mrs Joyce Hegarty, now widowed and retired, at 66 goes to Japan at Noriko's invitation to meet her real family and stay with them in Yokohama for three weeks over the New Year period. Joyce is a very ordinary housewife, lives in Sydney's western suburbs, a stalwart of the Ashfield Bowling Club (one gains the impression she'd never been out of the country before), and a devout Catholic. Nevertheless, she manages to fit in with good humour and genuine interest as best she could.

It was a very honest and amusing look at two cultures interacting or clashing, as the case may be. Joyce does not speak Japanese while Noriko's family speaks only Japanese (though her father has a few words of English) and lives very traditionally (no western food, sleeping on the floor, etc.)

Joyce's late husband, Jack, featured strongly as Noriko always felt close to him, despite, or because of the fact he had suffered as a result of his war experiences in New Guinea, fighting against the Japanese. This aspect is explored with Noriko mentally recalling Jack's pain while



viewing pictures in the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, and including him in prayers to her ancestors at the family tomb. It was very odd to see that typical Australian face in its Diggers' hat in such a setting.

In a reversal of the usual, frankness was most evident on the Japanese side, while the Australian was more non-committally polite. Noriko admitted she found having to interpret constantly a trial and even got irritated with Joyce at one point. Her father, a real card, made jokes about Australia of the usual Japanese sort, such as it being a big country with people who don't work in it. He said, when asked, that he didn't want to visit Australia as he had too many places in Japan he hadn't seen yet (a view my mother sympathises with as she feels there are too many places in Australia she hasn't seen and doesn't feel the need to go abroad anymore).

One got the impression that for both sides the experience had been interesting and enjoyable while it was happening but that neither the Sekiguchis nor Joyce would want to do it again. The Sekiguchis said that they felt they had to be on their best behaviour all the time, especially as Joyce had shown such hospitality to Noriko and they were grateful for that. That, plus the language barrier, would put a strain on things. Joyce, on the other hand, spoke of going to India "next time."

## Books

*The Yellow Lady* by Alison Broinowski, Oxford University Press, 1992. I read this a while ago but couldn't fit it into my last contribution. It examines the way Australians, particularly artists and novelists, have perceived and responded to Asia over the past 150 years or so.

Australia's contacts with Asia are long-standing, beginning with Indonesian fishermen's visits to north Australia well before 1700 as aboriginal art confirms. In the 1850s the Chinese came with the gold rush. In 1867 a troupe of Japanese musicians travelled Australia promoting their culture and there was a Japanese exhibit in international exhibitions held in Sydney in 1879 and Melbourne in 1880 and 1888.

The picture is not a particularly impressive one, despite this, ranging as it does from racist hostility shown the Chinese gold-diggers to fears of Japan at the turn of the century to indifference and ignorance through most of this century. Broinowski posits the conflict between geography (Australia is far from Europe and close to Asia) and history (Australia's ties with Europe, especially Britain and the pervasive view of Australia as an outpost and bastion of British culture in a remote spot, hence a lot of our 'cultural cringe'.)

Balanced against the indifference, ignorance or hostility are a large number of individuals, including some of Australia's greatest artists and composers, who have found in Asia a source of inspiration and the basis of a new approach that is neither Asian nor European. The most forward-looking seem to have been the potters and the composers, though there is the architect of early this century, Hardy Wilson, who proposed a form of Chinese and local styles to create a uniquely Australian style suitable to local conditions.

In between was another group that maintained a sort of split personality about Asia, people (like novelist Hal Porter) who had been fascinated early in life by an image of a particular Asian country (usually Japan, as in Porter's case) but were disillusioned by actually visiting it, thus beginning an ambivalent love-hate relationship (Porter certainly gives Japan of the 1950s and 1960s a real serve in his works).



As might be expected in such a book dealing with the arts, it is lavishly illustrated with Australian works which have been influenced by Asian art (usually Japan) along with works from those countries that may have inspired the Australian works. The text also quotes liberally from a whole slew of novels going back to the last century. What is fascinating is the variety of things influenced by Asia, not only novels, films, paintings, music, sculpture, pottery and architecture, but cartoons and TV series.

Broinowski concludes: "...Australians' ability to write convincingly about Asia and to make good films in Asian countries depended upon their ceasing to see themselves as foreigners there and to accept Asia in all its variety as part of mainstream Australian life, as the young were indeed beginning to do. But even then that was no guarantee...that Asians would accept them or would quickly change their own inherited images of Australia...Artists in any society have an obligation to explore beyond its limits. The Australian artists who sought to explore Asia and the Pacific did so for a variety of reasons, and the images they created varied widely. But they are generally in agreement: Australia is not Asia, but Asia and the Pacific are part of Australia's hemisphere and culture, an interesting and growing part. It is clear from their work that images of Asia reflect and affect Australians' image of themselves. Further, it is clear that until Asia occupies a place equal to the West in Australian minds, the nation's pursuit of its interests will remain distorted. If Australia's identity and self-image are to change, they must therefore do so in a way that located Australia in the Asia-Pacific hemisphere."

Bronze Mirror by Jeanne Larsen, Fawcett Columbine, 1991. This is a sort of follow up to *Silk Road* though it is set in the Sung Dynasty and involves a completely new set of characters, apart from some Immortals. The central theme concerns a mirror which shows other places and times and a story telling context between the Silkweb Empress and Tsang-jieh, chief minister of the Yellow Emperor in which other Immortals become involved.

The story concerns one Pomegranate, lady's maid in the impoverished Su household, and her mistress, Phoenix, a devout Buddhist and married to the elder son, as well as those they interact with.

Like *Silk Road*, it is marvellously richly textured with layers within layers, like one of those intricately carved ivory balls the Chinese make. There are references to history and myth (the Monkey King makes an appearance); questions about the storyteller's art - and responsibilities for creating - and playing with - people's lives. Indeed, the central story is told and retold as straight narrative or legends handed down or items from histories and so forth - variations on a theme.

One reviewer likened it to "A combination of *Shogun* and *General Hospital*...with a bit of *Dark Shadows* thrown in for good measure...A lush, supernatural Chinese soap opera." I'd add 'a touch of *Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*' as the sort of temporal paradox and playfulness found in that can be found in this, such as when Tsang-jieh whose tales had come down into human history as assorted legends, folklore, histories and storytellers' tales, makes use at one point of a story printed on paper from the Ming Dynasty which had come back through time to him.

The style is easy and light and amusing but there's lots going on and the double tale of Pomegranate in the human world of South China in the Sung Dynasty, and the Immortals in their world outside time telling their tales, playing with Pomegranate and her friends' fates is fascinating. A worthy successor to *Silk Road*. My only whinge is the cover. It depicts a woman in *Japanese* dress (to be precise, one in the garb of a *tayū*, a high-ranking courtesan, holding the mirror!!)