

CHANPLOITATION OR SPECIAL "WHERE NOT TO BUY 'EM" VIDEO REPORT FROM RIC MEYERS

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," as Charles Caleb Colton said in the nineteenth century, the filmmakers of Asia and knockoff artists of America must be sycophants indeed, since pale plagiarisms of Jackie Chan movies have been perpetrated on two fronts: one, by producers who couldn't think of anything original, and two, by film distributors who slap false names onto credits.

In other words, when buying those Jackie Chan movie tapes for \$5.99 at your local video store, beware. You may not be getting what you paid for. Here's why.

Curiously, there was only one attempt to "clone" Jackie Chan, which came after his Hong Kong success in *Drunken Monkey* in a *Tiger's Eye* (aka *Drunken Master*), when many Hong Kong hack artists started grinding out cheap versions of the same story with titles like *World of the Drunken Master* starring "Jack Long" and *Dance of the Drunken Mantis* starring "Jacky Chen." And since Jackie's international success was thwarted by such lackluster efforts as *The Big Brawl* (aka *Battle Creek Brawl*), *The Protector* and Chan's contribution to *Cannonball Run*, the rip-offs on this side of the Atlantic were limited to things like *The Jacky Chan Connection* — a rerelease of *To Kill with Intrigue* with a misleading poster that repeatedly proclaimed, "Starring Jacky Chan! Fight Scenes by Jacky Chan! Directed by Jacky Chan!"

But then came *Rumble in the Bronx*, and the true difference between Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan became apparent. For while Bruce is perpetuated with all manner of stand-ins with false names, Jackie is exploited by impostors named, not Jackie Chin, Jackie Chon, or Jackie Chun, but Jackie Chan. The schlockmeisters see no reason to change the name to protect the innocent... or guilty.

The problem came with the many movies Jackie made before he became a bona fide star in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. Hong Kong producers thought nothing of selling the video rights to these films to whoever asked for them, and had an unfortunate tendency to go out of business owing money to a variety of creditors — all who claimed rights to the aforementioned films and also thought nothing of repeatedly selling those rights to anybody.

The result is a growing wave of "Chanploitation" that is gripping the video industry. All the films Chan made for Lo Wei have been released by no fewer than four American video distribution companies, including CDDM, Simitar and, best of all, All Seasons Entertainment, who used better-quality tapes, transferred them in SP mode, created the best packaging, and sold their right to *Inside Kung-Fu* magazine.

Of these less than stellar efforts, pick up *Fearless Hyena* and maybe *Half a Loaf of Kung Fu* and *Spiritual Kung Fu*, but give the rest a jaundiced eye. But the Chan-offs don't stop there. A visit to the entertainment stores will reveal a veritable tsunami of strange knockoffs and flat-out fake-outs in the wake of Jackie yanking his video rights back from Tai Seng Video Marketing.

While Chan and company shop for reputable American companies to package his films with the quality that Toho brings to his Japanese tapes, seemingly every rip-off artist on the fringe of martial arts movie fandom is out for the down-and-dirty buck. Ever hear of Jackie Chans *Bloodpact*, proudly distributed by MNTEX Entertainment? Well, that's because it's actually *Dance of the Drunken Mantis*, one of the many inferior copycat movies made in the wake of *Drunken Master*, which doesn't even feature Jackie (nor does it feature the ninja MNTEX has also put on the video-box art).

How about Jackie Chan in *Ten Fingers of Death*, released by Magnum Video, or *Master with Cracked Fingers*, released by Arena in cooperation with Eastern Heroes? If you've heard of one, you've heard of both, because they are really the same awful movie — cobbled together by 21st

Century Entertainment way back when Jackie was being hyped for The Big Brawl. The film itself is a laughable hodgepodge featuring an extremely young Jackie, edited together with an older stuntman who keeps his hand in front of his face. [This film has also been released by Simitar under the name Eagle Shadow Fist, boxed with New Fist of Fury.— R.W.]

Incredibly, Arena/Eastern Heroes has also released several other Chan core-ons that the buyer should beware, including Drunken Fist Boxing, which has cover art stolen from Drunken Master II, but is actually another sans-Jackie fraud originally called The Story of the Drunken Master. Then there's their Top Fighter, an otherwise occasionally commendable documentary that flagrantly steals interviews from the Jackie Chan episode of The Incredibly Strange Film Show.

Meanwhile, you might want to miss EDDE Entertainment's subtitled version of Twin Dragons that looks like it was videotaped off a Chinatown movie theater screen by some guy in the audience. Even with all these shenanigans, I have to thank Magnum Entertainment for one thing: an amazingly good, subtitled, letterboxed version of Drunken Master (which they call The Drunken Master) with front and back box art "borrowed" from All Seasons Entertainment's version of Fearless Hyena.

Finally, there's Parade Video's Jackie Chan Rumble Packs — cleverly conceived, nicely packaged, two-tape knockoffs that take the cake for gall. In what is perhaps an homage to Bruce Lee, the package for the two incredibly cheap SLP-mode tapes for what they call "Round One" (instead of "Volume One") is clearly meant for "Round Two" and vice versa. The homage? Well, the titles for Fists of Fury and The Chinese Connection were accidentally switched as well when those famous Bruce films came to America.

By any name, these literally tacky tapes (say good-bye to your clean VCR heads!) feature two sad films from Jackie's teenage past as well as a very bad transfer of Jackie Chan's Police Force — the dubbed version of Police Story that appeared at the New York Film Festival — and Fists of Chan, a really terrible "documentary" that is a series of cobbled-together fight scenes from some of Jackie's pre-stardom films... as well as from a movie Jackie never even appeared in.

Who knows where the legalities lie on all the aforementioned, but as far as this martial arts movie maniac is concerned, stick with New Line, Miramax, and whichever company the rights for Chan's most recent classics go to. That way the patient kung fu connoisseurs will prosper while the con artists go bust.

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