

COMBAT FILM/OPINION



By Phil Hobden

<http://combatfilm.blogspot.com>



The Wonderful world of Fan Critics... *Part 2*

A few months back, I took an affectionate look at the wonderful world of user comments & reviews from the world famous Internet Movie Database. This month I continue my look at Internet Critics, this time looking at those films that only a mother could love. Films that are so bad they are just, well bad. Well, at least for most people...

Catwoman is a terrible movie. Universally despised by all... well all except UK user kael-5 "...I had heard very negative things about the movie I thought it was a wonderful take on Catwoman and personally I feel that its one of the best movies Halle Berry has starred in yet." So not her Oscar winning role in *Monsters Ball* then...

"...an awesome experience.", "...this film is pure genius.", "This movie rocked" and "This is my favourite movie of all time" could all be comments taken from the reviews of this years instant classic *The Dark Knight*. Could be but weren't. Nope this heap of praise was reserved for that REAL classic action film... Jean-Claude Van Damme's 1994 classic *Street Fighter*.

The *Marksman*, the 2005 little seen Wesley Snipes film was poorly received by both critics and fans. But there's still love for the film on the IMDB, especially by user Myles Wackrow "Watch it! Watch it! if you like any kind of movies watch it. Best movie ever"

Moving on... now when it comes to *Get Carter* you'd expect to read comments like "It's a winner...", "The film is a full blooded hit..." and "Beautiful photography, dizzying editing and camera angles..." Well you would. At least for the original. But these were written about the 2000 remake with Sly Stallone replacing Michael Caine, possible one of the worst remakes ever made.

Few people would argue that *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* was great (or even good). Okay maybe *Empire Magazine*, that gave the film four stars on it's original release but few others. Yet the IMDB has a lot of love for Lucas's stillborn prequel... "It is highly entertaining, and a very nice example of how the best writers and directors and musicians and actors and supporters in the world can turn a large budget into a large film." (user Randydeluxe)

Searching the whole world wide web there's not much love at all for the last instalment of the American Ninja franchise, *American Ninja V*. "This fifth outing in the American Ninja series is just as fine as the others, I got just what I expected..." Although Norway resident user Chrnaess was on his own, even here on the IMDB were even some of the worst movies ever made can find some love (for the record *American Ninja 5* was voted 62nd worst film of all time).

On the subject of Ninjas, former wrestler Hulk Hogan obviously needed a new bandana when he signed on to star in *3 Ninjas: High Noon At Mega Mountain*, a film that won't trouble many peoples top films of all times lists. What's even more scarier than the fact that 4,222 have taken time out of their short lives to watch this film is that IMDB user Jeffuary displays not even a hint of irony in his review of the IMDB's 55th worst film ever made : "Every once in a while a film comes along that makes you glad to be alive. Cinema is a beautiful art form, and no cinema is more gorgeous than *3 Ninjas: High Noon at Mega Mountain*."

Want more proof the some reviewers on the internet are just a review or two short of a padded room and white coats try these on for size: *Batman & Robin* "This is definitely one of the best no-brainer films of recent years... ", Kurt Russell uber flop *Soldier* "Entertaining, thought-provoking and exciting once the action starts!" and even the terrible *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* "if you're into a fast and fun movie, filled with lots of action, noise and over-the-top scenes, then *Charlie's Angels* is for you!"



I guess one thing this all shows is that no matter how bad a movie is, somewhere in the world there is an audience for it and if the world can love *Showgirls* (scrub that even I loved *Showgirls*) maybe *The Happening* does stand a chance... okay maybe not!

Finally (and for balance) I thought why not take a look at the comments on feature film project that I worked on - the marmite of action films *Left For Dead* (dir: Ross Boyask, 2005). "Man this movie sucks I'm glad I didn't pay for it (netflix)..." It's fair to say that user Jourdanmc wasn't a fan whilst user Mike Ellis from Tallahassee, FL has this to say "Don't watch this for action, don't watch it for acting, don't watch it for creativity, only watch it cause it overall it's worse than any movie you've ever seen."

Well you really cant please all the people, now can you.... For more check out the Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com

Phil Hobden
Editor - *Combat Film*

Next Month: Chuck Norris



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COMBAT FILM/REVIEWS



Crank: High Voltage (18) *Review by Richard Hawes*

An absurd punk action flick, modeled on comic books and video games like Grand Theft Auto, Crank: High Voltage is cartoonish, ironically offensive and perfect post-Pub viewing. Implausibly reprising his role as hitman Chev Chelios, Jason Statham runs wild again. His charisma and convincing aggression perfect for the deranged pace and music video style of his puppet masters. He's clearly having a lot more fun than when in guise of his restrained Transporter character. Featuring the late David Carradine and even Geri Halliwell, this curious and exciting sequel is certainly one of the strangest genre films you'll see this year. If you thought 2006's Crank was over the top you aint seen nothing yet. Recycling the plot of the first film and channelling some of the creative excess and eccentricity of Japanese filmmakers such as Takashi Miike and Noboru Iguchi, it's impossible to describe just how insane this film is.

ACTION 3/5 FILM 3/5

If you liked this try Transporter 2, Shoot 'Em Up, Wanted



X-Men Origins: Wolverine (12) *Review by Phil Hobden*

If you loved X-Men 1 or 2 avoid this film. I, however, your ideal X-Men movie was the soulless trash of part 3, Wolverine will be right up your street. See Wolverine isn't bad, it's just average. Even Jackman, who lets face it has been the star of the X-Men films so far, phones it in. Characters are shoe horned in, action sequences are unconvincing and weighed down by piss poor CGI and a big fat reset button is pressed at the end. Whilst not the disaster many expected it is pretty dull, right up until the OTT CGI smack down that offers nothing but yet another massive Shrug moment.

In short: There are far better films out there and if you can live with that fact, leave this on the shelf where it belongs.

ACTION 1/5 FILM 2/5

If you like this, try: X Men 1, 2 or (shudder) 3



Sniper (18) *Review by Andrew Skeats*

Finally released after co-star's Edison Chen's 'extra-curricular' activities held up it's release, Dante Lam's The Sniper is a mixed bag but serviceable enough to warrant a viewing. Three expert snipers (Chen, Richie Ren & Xiamong Huang) compete against one another to be the top shooter while simultaneously trying to take down an evil mob boss. It's all a load of flashy, hollow, pretty boy twaddle with the leads too good looking and fond of posing to really convince as tough-as-nails snipers. Melodrama sneaks its way in more often than not, Lam never sure whether he is making an arty thriller or a full on action film. However, The Sniper sustains tension to keep the viewer watching and excels in the action scenes. There isn't an abundance of them but when the action kicks off it's full of skilful gunplay and inventive uses for the sniper rifle. Not bad.

ACTION 3/5 FILM 2.5/5

If you like this, try: Shooter, Enemy at the Gates, Sniper (Tom Berenger)



12 Rounds (15) *Review by Phil Hobden*

WWE films so far have been rather hit and miss. The Commended was okay, The Marine was very good. See No Evil was dire and now comes 12 Rounds, voted by some critics as the worst action film ever made. Is it really that bad? Well no... not really. In fact at times 12 Rounds is pretty enjoyable. Okay so it's no Hardboiled but in that 80's retro way there is much to enjoy here, and a lot of that comes from John Cena who once again acquits himself quite well. In fact many WWE fans would argue he's a better actor than a wrestler but that's a debate for another magazine. As far as Saturday night Beer & Curry movies go you could do much worse.

ACTION 3/5 FILM 2.5/5

If you like this, try: The Marine; The Commended; Stone Cold



District 13: Ultimatum (15) *Review by Rich Badley*

Despite the promise of hope at the end of Luc Besson's parkour action movie in 2004, little has changed in the Parisian ghetto of District 13. Ultimatum is set 3 years after the events of its predecessor and the walled-off 'prison' is pretty much the same as it was before - full of tattooed gangs pointing AK-47s at each other.

The nimble Leito (David Belle) returns to scamper his way over the tenements and reteam with police captain Tomaso (Cyril Raffaelli) when he discovers a conspiracy set to reduce the District to rubble for a lucrative redevelopment project. The shady character behind it is the head of the secret service who insights rioting through the media while the President's hand hovers over various buttons that will call in a devastating airstrike.

Like the first film, the action is slick, frequent and deliciously absurd. Though the movie does take a less OTT storyline (the nuclear bomb is replaced by political bickering and greed), there are plenty of entertaining chases once things get going. It wastes time with a needlessly extended introduction of Tomaso at work, seemingly because director Patrick Alessandrin can't believe how good Raffaelli looks dressed as a woman, but then satisfies with bone-crunching set-pieces. Raffaelli does get most of the screentime while Leito is reduced to little more than a sidekick but this is testament to Raffaelli's progression as a bonafide action star, his acrobatics easily stealing the show in what could have been a much lazier cash-in.

ACTION 4/5 FILM 3/5

If you liked this try: *Escape from New York, Dobermann, Jump London*



Fighting (15) *Review by Phil Hobden*

First there was Never Back Down, then Never Surrender and now Fighting... all three proving that it's pretty easy to take one of the worlds fastest growing and exciting sports and make it dull as dishwater on screen. The uninspiring storyline of a street kid fighting for money has been done more times Paris Hilton and the flat direction does nothing to help it along. The fights are dull and pretty poorly put together and the whole film lacks scope... I've seen no budget Indie actioners with more style than this. Lead Channing Tatum isn't bad (if a little wet) but displays charisma that might see him be more than a pretty boy down the line but conversely Terrence Howard just doesn't work at all as mentor/promoter Harvey. In short the dull Fighting is one to avoid.

ACTION 1/5 FILM 1.5/5

If you liked this try: *Underground; Never Back Down; Karate Kid*

Reviews in Brief

Phil Hobden takes a look at this months other DVD releases.

If it's still in the cinemas when you read this **GI JOE (3/5)** is actually pretty good. This surprised me as it looked terrible from the trailers and pre-press. See you really should never judge a book by its cover...

QUANTUM OF SOLACE (4/5) gets a re-release this month. It's still better than everyone thinks...

AWAY DAYS (2/5) is another poor football hooligan film with very little to offer a viewer who has seen Green Street or Rise Of The Footsoler.

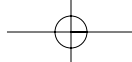
Not strictly Combat (okay not at all) but **THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT FIRE (4/5)** is a excellent B&W sci-fi thriller and gets it's DVD release this month.

Also worth a watch is **CORALINE (4/5)** the latest animated freak tale from Henry Sellick.

Brit film **TEN DEAD MEN (3/5)** can be picked up from HMV for a bargain price of £3.99 now. Another British film, **DOGHOUSE** is also out this month but we haven't seen it yet so can't comment.

MMA Corner:

With the PRIDE releases drying up, this month sees back to back **UFC's (95 & 96)** arrive on DVD. **UFC 95 (rrp £17.99)** is headlined by Diego Sanchez and Joe Stevenson with an undercard including Josh Koscheck VS Paulo Thiago, and Dan Hardy VS Rory Markham. **UFC 96 (rrp £17.99)** features Quinton Jackson, Keith Jardine, Matt Hamill, and Shane Carwin. Two very good shows and both worth picking up when they hit the shelves.



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COMBAT FILM/REVIEWS

The Not Quite Combat Review

13: GAME OF DEATH (18) *Review Andrew Skeates*

Produced by the makers of Ong Bak and Chocolate (but no martial arts here I'm afraid) 13 is a wicked black comedy/horror that twists convention at every opportunity. A down on his luck office worker gets a chance to pay off his debts and make a fortune when a mysterious phone call challenges him to a game. Said game involves 13 challenges that get more severe as the game goes along, all of which must be completed in order to win the money. This is where the ghoulish fun comes in as the protagonist must start by simply killing and eating a fly, to fighting strangers on a bus, to, well, better just to see for yourself as the less known, the more fun and macabre 13 is. Starting off as a black comedy, things soon turn more sinister, and gory, in this inventive and must see slice of Thai cinema.

FILM 4/5

If you liked this, try: The Game, Connected, Battle Royale



Ichi (18) *Review by Rich Badley*

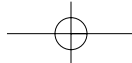
Tales of the blind swordsman Zatoichi have been retold hundreds of times in Japanese culture. So die hard fans may bristle at this reworking of the character from director Fumihiko Sori, who ditches the more light-hearted approach employed by Takeshi Kitano in his successful 2003 version.

Here, the hero is a woman, simply known as Ichi (Haruka Ayase).

Sori keeps the mood sombre as he follows a rather predictable spaghetti western template which sees Ichi drifts into town and into the middle of a feud. While Ichi remains stoic, her new companion, a samurai who's ironically unable to draw his weapon, gets drawn in. The pace is slow yet purposeful and the fight sequences follow suit, allowing time to marvel at the fluid sword work coordinated by Hiroshi Kuze who's worked with Kurosawa and Yamada on similarly impressive period pieces. Shame the bad guys appear to be from some weird Peter Pan/Lost Boys spin-off.

ACTION 4/5 FILM 3/5

If you liked this try: The Seven Samurai, Love and Honour, Zatoichi



IMPORT CORNER

Ong Bak 2 Review by Richard Hawes

His fans have waited 4 years and now he's back. Tony Jaa has returned for his third leading role and expectations are high. But can fans expect to be as blown away by Ong-Bak 2 as they were by 2003's Ong-Bak and 2005's Tom Yum Goong aka Warrior King?

Not really a sequel (it has a historical setting) Ong-Bak 2 was proudly announced as a film that would set a new benchmark, not only in Thai action cinema but in the career of its leading man. It features the star in exciting new action scenes, which see him use a variety of weapons, and also trying to develop skills as a filmmaker. Tony Jaa is not only the star, but also the director of Ong-Bak 2. Sadly, as many critics have already observed, it seems Jaa took on too much.

Like other action heroes handed the megaphone (Steven Seagal and Jean Claude Van Damme etc) Jaa was clearly unprepared for behind the camera demands of filmmaking and rumours of Jaa's stress and production problems have been plentiful. It's no surprise to find the film that has finally been released is very flawed. Even with action choreographer Panna Rittikrai brought in to co-direct and help save the project, the results are a huge disappointment. Both Jaa's earlier films look good and have incredible action, but are extremely poor in terms of pacing, drama and storytelling. The same is true of Rittikrai's efforts as director, including Born to Fight (2004). Ong-Bak 2 has all those familiar problems and more. The experience weakened because the fights are fewer and less exciting. As a consequence of these shortcomings it's impossible to overlook the weaknesses of the story. As incoherent as it is ambitious.

Jaa's phenomenal skills have always been the redeeming feature in his films, but here he hardly shines. That isn't to say he's bad. On the contrary the fight scenes are rather interesting. But it's only in the final act that we experience the kind of excitement we're come to expect from a Tony Jaa film. He's still an awe-inspiring performer and not a great actor. Here he plays a more challenging role and simply isn't up to it. More than in his earlier roles, he cannot keep viewers interested when he's not fighting and we just can't connect with his character.

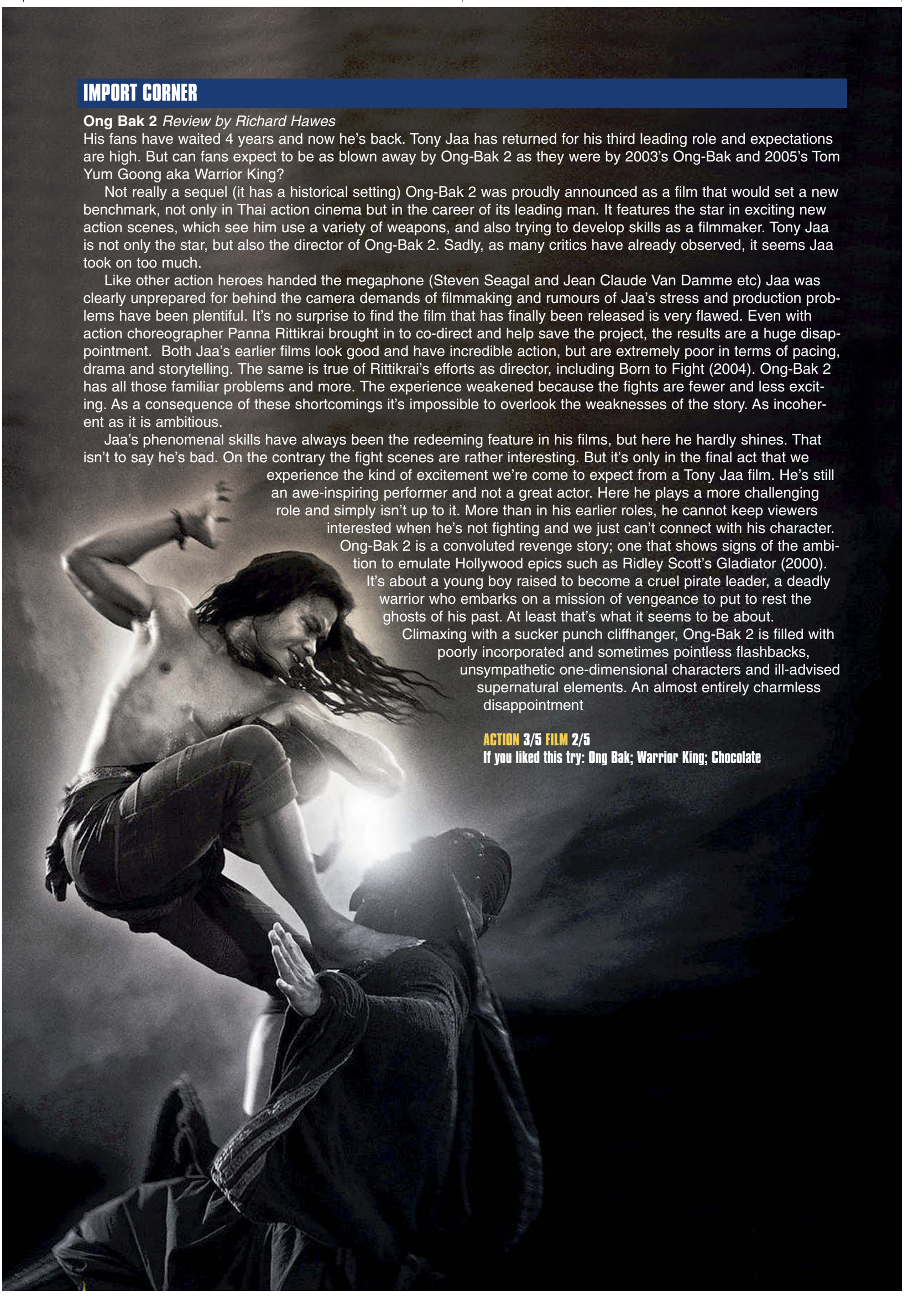
Ong-Bak 2 is a convoluted revenge story; one that shows signs of the ambition to emulate Hollywood epics such as Ridley Scott's Gladiator (2000).

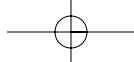
It's about a young boy raised to become a cruel pirate leader, a deadly warrior who embarks on a mission of vengeance to put to rest the ghosts of his past. At least that's what it seems to be about.

Climaxing with a sucker punch cliffhanger, Ong-Bak 2 is filled with poorly incorporated and sometimes pointless flashbacks, unsympathetic one-dimensional characters and ill-advised supernatural elements. An almost entirely charmless disappointment

ACTION 3/5 FILM 2/5

If you liked this try: Ong Bak; Warrior King; Chocolate





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COMBAT FILM/REVIEWS

COMPETITIONS

To coincide with the DVD& BluRay release of **ICHI** we have three copies of the film to give away care of our friends as Manga Entertainment.

To win this great prize all you have to do is answer the following question:

What weapon does ICHI like?

- a) Sword
- b) Browning Rifle
- c) Ninja Star

Email your name, address and answer to ichi@martialartsinprint.com

To coincide with the DVD release of **FIGHTING** we have copies of the film to give away, courtesy of our friends at Universal Pictures UK.

Which dance film did FIGHTING star Channing Tatum feature in?

- a) Dirty Dancing
- b) Step up 2 The Streets
- c) Step Up

Email your name, address and answer to fighting@martialartsinprint.com

To coincide with the DVD release of **SPLINTER** we have copies of the film to give away, courtesy of our friends at Anchor Bay Entertainment UK Ltd.

Which war movie did SPLINTER star Tom Sizemore feature in?

- a) Black Hawk Down
- b) Platoon
- c) Hurt Locker

Email your name, address and answer to splinter@martialartsinprint.com

MUST SEE ACTION FILM

Each Month Richard Hawes suggests a must see action film for your viewing pleasure. This month:

Ong-Bak (2003)

The first time you see Tony Jaa you know you are witnessing history. His iconic status secured the moment he leaps over a moving car and then immediately under another. A remarkably skilled Thai martial artist, protégé of stuntman Panna Rittikrai, Jaa has still only had two leading roles and is already a legend. His brutal Muay-Thai moves and acrobatic ability showcased in a series of set pieces as intricate as those of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. The story of a young villager's journey to retrieve the head of a stolen statue of Buddha, Prachya Pinkaew's film is pure martial arts cinema, flawed as storytelling but astounding as entertainment.

Ong-Bak is available online from Amazon.co.uk and all leading retailers.

NEWS AND RUMOURS

The **AVATAR** trailer is now on the web. Far from groundbreaking but it looks pretty okay. Judge for yourself when the film opens in December...

DONNIE YEN is considering retiring...

On the subject of Donnie Yen, **IP MAN** isn't even out in the UK yet but already the producers are ramping up on it's sequel...

RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE has started shooting. Directed by Anderson and starring Milla Jovovich I couldn't really care less. Oh and it will be in 3-D. Dead horse. Flogging.

Expect the guv-inator Arnie and MR Die Hard Bruce Willis to make cameos in the 'if it was any cooler it would be an iceberg' **EXPENDABLES...**

GI JOE & WOLVERINE sequels have been green lit. As have a third and hopefully better **TRANSFORMERS** movie. Let's hope Michael Bey is busy for that one...

The Isaac Florentine directed Scott Adkins starring **NINJA** will arrive care of Lionsgate in November...

TOP FIVE...

This month: Action legend **GARY DANEILS** presents his *Top 5 Action Films.*

1. 'Magnificent 7',
2. 'The Great Escape'
3. All Bruce Lee's movies,
4. 'Blood of Heroes',
5. 'Eastern Condors'

