

Classic Cinema

This Week: Enter the Dragon

By MARKO PERIC

This Week -- It's amazing the problems one can solve with a good kick.

Enter the Dragon

Bruce Lee, John Saxon, Jim Kelly.

Directed by Robert Clouse
1973, 99 minutes, colour, R

Okay, this may not be the first film that comes to mind when one thinks about classics. But this is the classic martial arts film. *Enter the Dragon* is Bruce Lee's only English speaking role, and his last completed film. Unlike most films in this genre, it actually has a plot. It may not be *Citizen Kane*, but the action unfolds logically for the most part. It is immensely enjoyable, and worthy of re-watching several times.

Bruce Lee plays a martial artist (conveniently named Lee) sent to infiltrate the island fortress of Mr. Han, a wealthy recluse who makes his money from the drug trade and prostitution. Han is hosting a martial arts tournament, to which Lee has received an invitation. We also learn that Han's bodyguard was responsible for the death of Lee's sister, giving the hero a darker motive for attending the tournament.

Lee meets up with two other martial artists (Saxon and Kelly) enroute to the island. Upon arrival they attend a banquet and meet the enigmatic Mr. Han. Lee contacts another agent on the island, and starts poking around for evidence of Han's activities. Everyone else is more concerned with the tournament, but soon Han's darker side is revealed.

Any more plot would spoil the story, but just let me say that just about everybody gets in their share of hand to hand combat. Like I said, this

isn't *Citizen Kane*.

Acting: Not bad for this type of film. Lee is quite good, actually. His character is well-rounded and the motivations are clear. Not Oscar material, but good. Saxon also does a good job as the American martial artist running away from his debts. Most of the other characters are minor, except Han, who is perhaps overdone. A real stand out is Kelly, in his first screen role. The part might be a touch dated (he sports a big Afro), but would have made perfect sense in 1973. He also gets the best lines in the movie.

Directing: Nothing special, but Clouse should be commended for bringing the martial arts genre into the mainstream. This is the film that made Bruce Lee a superstar, still revered today. Clouse melds a believable plot with incredible action, and neither is lost. He overdoes it a little with the early flashback scenes, but makes up for it with the final house-of-mirrors sequence. I do question his decision to include a few seconds of nudity, which caught me by surprise, since I had seen a slightly-edited TV version before getting a rental copy.

Memorable Scenes: All the fight scenes are fabulous, especially Lee's big scene with dozens of Han's guards. The final house-of-mirrors scene is amazing, if a tad confusing. You might want to rewind that one and take a second look. Also, for a touch of humour, watch for Lee's method of clearing the radio room in under five seconds. Another scene to watch is Saxon's first fight at the tournament. Pay close attention, and you'll see what he's up to, and what Kelly is up to as well.

Best Lines: Kelly gets all these. He tells Han "Man, you just walked out of a comic

book." In the same scene, Han is asking him about facing defeat. He replies, "When it comes, I won't even notice it...I'll be too busy looking good." He has other good lines, but these are probably the most memorable.

Bottom Line: If you only see one martial arts film in your entire life, this should be the one. The action is unbelievable, the pace frantic, and the plot engrossing. There are many touches of brilliant humour. Of course, it certainly is not for everyone. The fighting is intense, and not intended for the squeamish. A lot of people die, but only one of them is killed with a weapon. Not everyone is going to enjoy it. Of course, if violence does not bother you, this is highly recommended.

Available: Shouldn't be hard to find. Any video store with the slightest martial arts section should have a copy. Blockbuster has two copies.

As well, I saw it last year on CTV, so keep an eye on the television listings, and it may come up again.

Recent Comparison:

Rumble in the Bronx

Jackie Chan, Anita Mui, Francoise Yip.

Directed by Stanley Tong and Jackie Chan.

1996, 97 minutes, colour, R

Okay, these films have little in common other than the fact that both are action-packed martial arts flicks. And the fact that like Lee, Chan does his own fighting, and is a martial arts expert. He even does his own stunts, and has the broken bones to prove it. This film has a plot involving a grocery store and an evil syndicate, but really it's an excuse to tie in countless fight scenes. This can be forgiven, however, because it's just so much

fun. Chan jumps and kicks his way out of trouble a dozen times, and when that won't do, he borrows a Lamborghini. I won't bother to explain everything that happens, but just let me say this film includes good guys (primarily Chan), bad guys, and really bad guys. And in the end, the good guys win, the bad guys aren't so bad after all, and the really bad guys lose.

Like most martial arts films, this isn't for everyone. The action is intense, occasionally bloody, and the really bad guys are unbelievably evil and nasty, and tend to use profanity. As well, they commit one of the worst murders I've ever seen. Fortunately, we really don't see that much of them. But if the above doesn't bother you, this film is definitely worth watching. In Canada the rating is 14A, but the American R rating makes more sense. Oh yeah, watch out for the 70's music.

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