



Deadend of Besiegers

Cynthia Khan, Yu Rong Guang. Directed by Zhang Siu Wai. Released by CAV Distribution. Hong Kong (Mandarin/Cantonese/English). 86 minutes. Not rated. No extra features.

Hong Kong movies about traditional heroes and about the origins of specific martial arts and martial arts forms are always popular. "Deadend of Besiegers" is one of the better ones of the Hong Kong New Wave period of the '80s and '90s and features two of the genre's most exciting stars. The story basically dramatizes events surrounding the historic trip to China of the Japanese martial artist who, through exposure to Kung Fu, was able to return to Japan and introduce what would eventually become Karate. Yu Rong Guang, who stars opposite Donnie Yen in the restored Miramax release of "Iron Monkey" now in release, here stars as the Japanese Yamanaka who, through the encouragement of a monk and subsequent martial adventures, learns Kung Fu. Key to his process is a lethal woman, a village leader played by the great Cynthia Khan. For a time Cynthia Khan and Michelle Yeoh were confused and sometimes thought to be sisters while Yeoh was performing under the similar name Michelle Khan. But they aren't, even though they come from similar backgrounds -- both took up martial arts after being sidelined by dancing injuries -- and the fact that Cynthia's career began when she was recruited to step into the void left at D&B production house after Michelle Yeoh had moved on. Such details are nominal, however, for those simply looking for a good, rousing, martial arts adventures. And the fighting in "Deadend of Besiegers" is superb throughout. The blend of Japanese and Chinese fighting styles and the innovative approach to the choreography is reminiscent of "Fist of Legend" though it often feels more like "The Tai Chi Master." Neither comparison to a famed Jet Li film can be necessarily taken as a slur. This is first rate stuff and has to be considered one of the better recent CAV releases from the World Video catalog. A note regarding audio -- this is also one of the handful of such titles that features complete tri-audio tracks: English, Cantonese and Mandarin. So no one has any excuse to miss it. Purists, of course, will insist on the Cantonese track with English subtitles, which is the proper way to best enjoy the picture.-By Wade Major

Collector Rating: WORTH FULL PRICE *** (Audio: C, Video: C+, Features: F)
