



Heroes Among Heroes

Donnie Yen, Wong Yuk, Ng Man-Tat, Fennie Yuen, Sheila Chan, Xiong Xin-Xin, Pau Fong. Directed by Yuen Wo-Ping. Written by Chan Ching-Chung. Produced by Yuen Wo-Ping, Chan Ching-Chung. Released by CAV Distribution. Hong Kong (Cantonese). 91 minutes. Not rated. Trailer.

One of the many popular Wong Fei-Hong tie-in movies that emerged in the aftermath of the success of "Once Upon a Time in China," "Heroes Among Heroes" attempts to weave yet another Wong Fei-Hong story into a fabric of Chinese history where it doesn't quite belong. But that's okay because, like director Yuen Wo-Ping's "Iron Monkey," which has been restored and released by Miramax in the U.S. some eight years after the fact, this telling of a Wong Fei-Hong story is a consistently fun, action-packed delight. As with "Iron Monkey," "Heroes Among Heroes" reteams Master Yuen with his great discovery, Donnie Yen. This time, however, Yen is neither an adversary to Wong (as he was in "Once Upon a Time in China II") nor Wong's father (as he was in "Iron Monkey"). Here he plays a distinct hero all his own who takes on a gang known as the Fire Lotus while Wong alternately battles opium smugglers. The fetching Fennie Yuen steps in and plays opposite Yen in a fashion clearly designed to emulate the relationship between Jet Li's Wong and Rosamund Kwan's Aunt Yee in the "Once Upon a Time in China" pictures. The good news is that the emulation works, with this unusual relationship offering both actors several fine opportunities to showcase their skills independent of action.

Action, however, is the film's first concern and one that it handles expertly. It's not one of Yuen Wo-Ping's best, but even middling Yuen is better than 90% of everything else. Here, particularly, one can see extended flashes of the brilliance that would later reach western audiences via Yuen's involvement in "The Matrix" and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Yen is at his best throughout and much of the stunt work still stands among the best in Hong Kong fight film history.

Superlative effort throughout -- and not to be missed by any longtime fan or newcomer to the genre. -By Wade Major

Collector Rating: WORTH FULL PRICE ***1/2 (Audio: C+, Video: B-, Features: D+)