

KUNG FU CINEMA

INSTANT KUNG FU MAN Rating: ***

Synopsis

Shao Hu, a mischievous Shaolin apprentice tricks his master into letting him leave the temple without learning kung fu. The master sends Fu Sing, a skilled martial artist to bring him back. Hu soon finds himself mistaken for his twin brother, Shao Tu whose martial arts skill and is well known. Meanwhile Tu steals a large sum of money, kills an official, and double-crosses his partner, Yi Lan who escapes with his life. Enjoying the notoriety of his brother's reputation, Hu manages to outsmart a band of highwaymen while being recruited to find the dead official's killer. When Yi returns to seek vengeance, Hu is mistaken for his brother, much to his dismay. Now he must rely on his brother and Fu Sing to stop Yi.

Review

Humor and exciting martial arts prove themselves to be a winning combination despite a meandering tale of mistaken identity that features some of the genre's best talent. Yeh Fei Tang works overtime by playing twin brothers, one a ruthless kung fu expert and the other an unskilled, yet clever conman named Shao Hu. It's the latter brother that proves the more interesting. Touches of Yuen Woo Ping's (Iron Monkey) whimsical influence can be seen in the choreography as Hu beats termite-infested wooden men to pieces with glee. In another scene, Hu hides a large circular magnet in his monk's hat for the sole purpose of snagging opponents' weapons. By the end of the fight, Hu has half a dozen weapons dangling from his back. The film nearly turns into a slapstick parody on the level of Wong Jing's work in *City Hunter* and *Last Hero in China*. Plentiful martial arts greatness comes in the forms of legendary leg fighters Hwang Jang Lee and John Liu. Both actors appeared in numerous films opposite each other and their spectacular sparring is a joy to watch. Their characters may have little to say but their actions speak volumes. The first and longest encounter takes place near the end. It gives both men a chance to show their strengths. Hwang is the speedball with a whip-like kick that lashes out in the blink of an eye. Liu favors his right leg and while slower, appears nimble enough to use his leg as a third arm. With the exception of Yeh, whose martial arts performance while playing Shao Tu was uninspiring, the remaining fights are played more for laughs, which balances the film nicely. An honorable mention must go to the folks who chose the music for the film. Along with those trademark dubbed lines comes a soundtrack that should provide at least a few moments of trivial entertainment as you try to guess where that tune was sampled from. Likewise, there is nothing like hearing a rendition of Old Dixie playing during an all out kung fu brawl.

Without a doubt, fans of Hwang Jang Lee and super-kickers in general should be lining up to get their hands on *The Instant Kung Fu Man*. In addition, the budding choreography of Yuen Wo Ping along with a few guffaws thrown in will perk the interest of kung fu/comedy aficionados.

- Mark Pollard / Kung Fu Cinema