

Here Come the Kung fu Clones by Carl Jones

The author has asserted his right to be identified as author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Disclaimer: The author and publisher accept no liability for use, misuse, injury (physical, mental, pecuniary, miscellaneous) arising from emulation of martial arts techniques depicted or discussed within these pages.

A Woowums Book

© Carl Jones 2010. Published by Woowums Books

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-10: 0956012319 ISBN-13: 978-0-9560123-1-9

Every care has been taken to properly license, obtain permission to use and acknowledge ownership of copyrighted material. However there are instances where the owner has been untraceable. If your copyright needs to be asserted please contact the publisher at the earliest opportunity.

THIS BOOK IS NOT ABOUT BRUCE LEE but the flurry of imitators who followed in his wake. To learn about the life, career and legacy of the real Bruce Lee visit the official Bruce Lee website <http://www.brucelee.com>

Typeset by Nic Cairns, 22:22 Productions, Nottingham

Printed and bound in the UK by 4edge.co.uk, Hockley, Essex

Covers: Jeffrey Bona (www.cityonfire.com)

Rear Cover Artwork: Beverley Bowen



1976

The Year It All Came Together

Bruce Lee *Against the Supermen* was made in 1976, the year that Li finally came into his own. Starting with *Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger*, he blossomed into a true Kung fu star. His acting and martial arts skills shine in this gritty underworld thriller that still hinges on a Bruce Lee exploitation plot but is handled admirably by director Lee Tso Nam (*The Leg Fighters* etc).

The film would be quickly picked up by American distributors Dimension Pictures and released with great success in the US, going on to out-gross the (then) new version of *King Kong* in New York before taking the rest of the country by storm. In this film Li finally gets a chance to act and use his ascending martial arts skills to great effect. The film starts with our hero David Lee (Li), who is nicknamed Tiger, meeting



up with Bruce Lee (also Li via split-screen) on a movie set. They are both old friends and fellow martial artists. Lee complains of headaches and mysterious phone calls and asks his friend to investigate, should he suddenly die (like you do...)! Tiger returns to his Kung fu school in Singapore and news reaches him of Lee's death; reflecting on Lee's final words he returns to Hong Kong and hooks up with a reporter friend to uncover the truth. Along the way he discovers that a criminal gang was blackmailing Lee's lover Suzy Young. They tell her to ask Lee if he would be a drugs courier for them (being an International celebrity and all); Suzy tapes the conversation putting her at risk. The gang torture her, kill the reporter and rape Tiger's girlfriend before he puts paid to the gang, including old adversaries Lung Fei (actually called Lung Fei in the plot...) and San Moo. The final set-piece with the gang boss, The Baron, played by the classy veteran Chang Yi, is a superb battle, set amongst

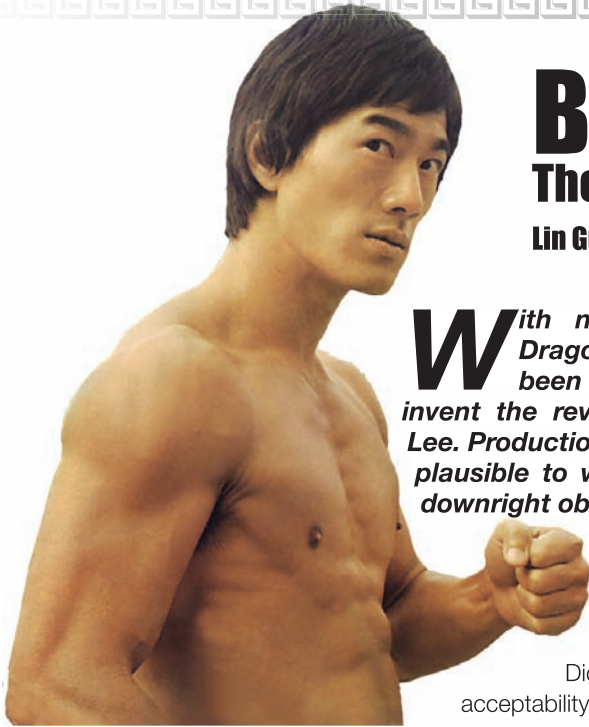
rocky pools and inlets at a beach location. The fight is brilliantly photographed and staged as Chang Yi tries to shish-kebab Li with his sword stick before ending up on his own blade.

Everything about this film is improved from Li's earlier efforts; the budget is obviously increased (filmed in Hong Kong and Taiwan), cast members, choreography and, in the English version at least, (library) music, titles, translation (of the script) and dubbing. Things could only get better for Li...couldn't they?



“THE FINAL SET-PIECE... IS A SUPERB BATTLE, SET AMONGST ROCKY POOLS AND INLETS AT A BEACH LOCATION”

A sequel of sorts quickly followed called *Return of the Tiger*. This film is only related by title as Li plays a completely different character (Chan Hung), a mystery man who is constantly playing two rival crime gangs off against each other. Most of the cast of the earlier film re-assemble, along with the lovely and lethal Angela Mao, who flits in and out of the plot as Li's assistant. The most notable and surprising addition is Paul Smith of *Midnight Express* fame as one of the gang leaders. The story itself is quite ordinary and muddled. At one point Li states that he “wants to get the man who killed his father”, but nothing is made of this and by the end there seems a great need to dispense with any coherence in order to usher in the final set-piece, which takes place in the abandoned factory setting from the first film. Other settings are also re-used, such as the sports stadium and the large conference room, and at one point eagle-eyed viewers will spot a framed US poster from the first film hanging on an office wall. There doesn't seem to be any great leap forward in Li's abilities, though the fights are, on the whole, crisper and we get to see him execute the jump-spin kicks that would be come such a staple in later films. A further instalment, again by title only, will be dealt with later.



Bruce Li

The Man, The Myth

Lin Gua Wong

With nearly three decades on the *Dragon Wagon*, producers have been undaunted in their quest to reinvent the revenue reaping image of Bruce Lee. Productions have ranged from potentially plausible to what can only be described as downright obscure.

Amidst the ashes of screen time we have witnessed an abundant supply of wannabees kicking their way through many a simulation. I'm Spartacus!?

Did any of these simulators hit the point of acceptability or did they simply miss the plot?

From a field of many, one man has sustained an audience. His movies are still sought after by collectors all over the world, a legend in his own reel-time: **BRUCE LI**.

His real name is James Ho Chung Tao, a physical education graduate from Taiwan. After serving time in the stuntman school of hard knocks, Ho's profile was raised by producers, manufacturing a new screen name and in turn calculating a success story for film distributors around the world. Beyond the prodigal pseudonym, James Ho made many a good action film. Often constricted by uncaring producers, Ho always gave an energetic performance. Testament to this can be seen in films *Lama Avenger*, *Deadly Strike*, *Gold Connection*, *Chinese Stuntman* and the perpetual *Bruce Lee – The Man, The Myth*. We re-enter the dragon's den of martial art movie history with the man himself. Here's James with the Ho-down.

Lin Gua Wong: *When and where were you born?*

James Ho: I was born in the Taiwanese countryside in 1950.

What was your life like before the movie years?

Well, approximately half way through high school, I was immersed in ancient martial art novels. I was also a keen watcher of the old *Knight Errant* fighting films. In addition the great 007s and especially *Our Man Flint* with James Coburn. I admired Coburn for his cool, calm and collected presence.



status, and the disc reviewed here is a welcome addition to the fan's collection for the sheer quality of product rather than the actual film.

The premise for this movie is that Lee Hsiao Lung (Bruce Li, billed here as Lee Roy Lung) is a lookalike martial artist/gymnast, and offered the job of completing Bruce Lee's last project. When he agrees to the task we are treated (?) to a frankly ludicrous story of a stolen package of dirty money, a kidnapped girlfriend and a lacklustre battle to the top of a huge pagoda staffed by various martial-loonies. This is not one of Bruce Li's best, but passes its short running time with enough guilty pleasures to keep you smiling.

The front cover is recreated on the actual disc itself, containing a fantastic anamorphic widescreen uncut print of the film, which is



one of the best transfers I've ever seen and quite an eye opener when you compare it to other DVD Kung fu cheapies. The film probably never looked this good on its first release. The colours are rich and vibrant and there's barely a scratch or spot in sight! You have to see how good this is! Arrow Films (UK) have done a masterful job and it's an unusual title for them to distribute as they tend to concentrate on European 'arty' films.

FISTS OF BRUCE LEE

aka: *Interpol*

Bruce Li, Lo Lieh, Wei Ping Au

Directed by: *Ho Chung Tao*

(*Bruce Li*)

1978

I finally got it! The long lost epic *Fists of Bruce Lee*. It came from the US on a double DVD along with *Image of Bruce Lee* and I couldn't wait to load it into my player. Would Lo Lieh's 'Bionic Chain Punch' be worth the wait? Could I stand the sight of Bruce Li's white polyester flares again!?

To be honest, I'd rate this as the second worst movie Li ever made. What's more, he directed the thing too and a right scissors and paste job it is! Li plays an undercover Interpol agent (hence the alternative title) posing as an electronic security systems expert. He's installing a system for a known crime boss Mr. Lo (the translator from *Fist of Fury II*) who also has a pretty daughter who develops a crush on our hero. Anyway I think Li is trying to obtain a list of gang members from Lo and he's not the only one either... two rival gangs would give their arms to get this list. Various battles ensue including an interesting fight in a fairground. Actually the film is basically scenes of badly acted dialogue interspersed with okay Kung fu action. You find yourself pleading for another fight to liven things up!

Li has a recurring nemesis who is a Hwang Jang Lee-alike (beard and all), who shows some decent kicks. Lo Lieh basically has a bit part as a bodyguard for Lo. At the climax Li and his Nemesis (who also turns



out to be an Interpol Agent) go against Lo Lieh with his Chain punch which is really a dummy gloved hand on...A CHAIN! ...that he swings around. What a letdown. Any good points? Well it's fun spotting all of the actors/stuntmen/bit players that appeared in other Bruce Li films and some of the locations are nice...but that's about it. Oh there is one really hilarious scene. Master Lo's daughter is kidnapped and driven off in a black limo. What does Li do? Chase after it on a pedal bike. He then gets bushwhacked along the way and his chain falls off! So he continues the chase on foot. Wouldn't the budget stretch to a taxi then? For completists only. 📺



Playing the Game

Versions, Perversions and Interpretations

Will The Real "GAME OF DEATH" Stand Up?!

For decades it's been common knowledge to martial arts fans that the late super star Bruce Lee had filmed many thousands of feet of film for his uncompleted *Game of Death* project. The footage was left in storage for a number of years while his film producer and partner Raymond Chow decided how to present it. During this time a number of copycat productions emerged from independent producers who hoped to cash in on the unsuspecting public; they were already being conned with numerous look-alike fake Bruce Lee movies.

Suddenly a rash of magazine articles with accompanying photographs appeared in martial art and film journals around the world. Details of the uncompleted film were sparse but at the same time tantalising to fans; Bruce Lee had battled his way to the top of a giant pagoda, stopping on each floor to fight an expert in different martial art styles. His character was a man unburdened by the constraints of any set pattern or form of fighting. To show his modern and renegade-like disdain he chose to not dress in the attire of any system, but rather to show himself as a new free-thinking super athlete. Dressed in the now legendary one-piece yellow jumpsuit, he became more than a legend to some. Rumours circulated about the film. Everyone was sure that *Game of Death* would soon be flying into cinemas around the world. 'Electrifying' was one word bandied about regarding the footage. But then weeks became months and then years as delay after delay stalled the completion of the film. In the meantime the imitation flicks ground on. Pseudo-



the choreographer (the standout scene being the locker room fight between Kim and Bob Wall), and of course the genuine Bruce Lee who demonstrated the art of cinematic Jeet Kune Do on his three opponents. Although his scenes were quite literally chopped to pieces by editor Alan Patillo he did (in retrospect) a fine job with his rapid and dynamic editing, really bringing out the best of obviously quite longer scenes when first shot.

It's anyone's guess why the original (i.e. longer) scenes and storyline was not used. Jan Spears' (aka Robert Clouse) story was so obviously very weak, and the addition of the likes of Dean Jagger, Gig Young and Hugh O'Brien just sunk the film with so much mediocrity. Nevertheless, it went on to do great box office business around the world, even in the UK where the Lee/Inosanto sequence was completely removed by the scissor-happy censors.

Within months of the release of *Game of Death*, rumours started circulating that a sequel was in the works entitled **Tower of Death**, which featured even more unseen Bruce Lee footage. Facts began to trickle out in Hong Kong magazines, naming Ng See Yuen as the director and giving hints of things to come. In hindsight it's amazing that this project got the green light. The promised unseen footage that was not used in the first film was withdrawn by Raymond Chow and so Ng See Yuen was forced to re-write the script and salvage the Bruce Lee sequences via some *Enter the Dragon* outtakes that lasted barely seven minutes. Once again stand-ins were needed (Kim Tai Chung and Yuen Biao) to slot together with the old close-ups from the previous Lee films.

The plot (what there was of it) came straight from the Bruce Le/Shao Lung/Bruce Li rip-off file marked barking mad. Here I will try to make sense of what's on screen:

- Billy Lo (Bruce Lee/ Kim Tai Chung) has a mate, Chin Ku (the great Hwang Jang Lee) who is a great martial artist.
- Billy visits the Shaolin Temple where his brother Bobby (also Kim Tai Chung) is studying.
- Chin Ku dies.
- Billy investigates and after a few fights ends up dead.
- Bobby vows to get revenge.
- He kills a lot of bad guy flunkies.
- Chin Ku re-appears (alive!), tells Bobby that he's a drug-lord and had Billy killed.
- Bobby kills him.

And that's basically it. There is no real logic to any of the scenes except to usher in the fight scenes which are the film's saving grace. Choreographed by Yuen Woo Ping, they were state of the art for 1980, when the film was made with several stand-out sequences; the best of which are Bobby's battle with the guards in the underground tower and his

the 'Best' of the Rest

If Bruce Lee had been a fictitious character rather than a real living legend, the world could have more readily accepted his replacement with the same interest; interest that goes with the changing of actors in the James Bond role or when Doctor Who regenerates. The Lee clones may have had greater success had each one not been seen as a bona fide successor to (arguably) the world's greatest martial artist, attempting to do it in no-budget copies of Bruce Lee's back catalogue.

The following pages deal with some of the best of the 'other' 'Lee-a-Likes' who invaded the world's cinema screens and leapt into the living room during the home video boom of the 1980s.

DRAGON LEE

A Korean martial artist trained in both Hapkido and Taekwondo, Dragon Lee had a superb physique and a look of Bruce Lee facially. The real-problem was that Dragon overdid anything that was meant to resemble the real deal... head shaking, grimacing and generally coming over as an over-excited wacko in most of his films... even when he wasn't 'doing' Bruce Lee. He had the techniques and looked good on camera but his eccentricity in his performances became a guilty pleasure rather than something special. He has his fans to this day and has continued to appear in Korean films and TV. His high points came in the films, *Last Fist of Fury* (the feature film as part of *The Real Bruce Lee*) and *The Clones of Bruce Lee*, an insane quickie that has to be seen to be believed.



BRUCE LE

Bruce Le (real name Huang Kin Lung) looked more like Bruce Lee than Dragon Lee. Starting out as a Shaw Brothers bit-part player he soon graduated to playing in low-grade films that traded on his likeness to the Late Great. Most of these productions were backed by

TREASURE OF BRUCE LEE (1979)

It seems Wong Lung is still searching for his uncle in this semi-sequel to *The Return Of Bruce*. Large sunglasses in place? Check. White vest to show-off muscles? Check. Polyester twenty inch flares? Check. Manila locations. Check. Ok, let's go...

Lung's uncle, Mr. Santos, fought against the Japanese in World War II and buried a casket containing a secret Kung fu manual to stop it falling into the enemy's hands – or something like that, as the dreadful dubbing, with heavily-accented voices, make it a real chore to understand what is happening. Anyway, a bitch-queen gang boss, who is half-Japanese, wants the treasure and will do anything to get it. She's tough too, and likes nothing better than beating up her men and breaking boards while dressed in hot-pants and knee-boots (...oh, hit me honey!). After much to-ing and fro-ing and kicking and punching, Lung is confronted by Nick Cheung Li, some Shaolin Bronzemen (you



know the sort...) and, get this, Kung fu fighting midgets! One of whom is a ringer for Prince or The Artist, or whatever name he goes under these days – except he has a penchant for orange rather than purple. Lung is also treated to a massage by a rather large lady whom he knocks out ...well, she was trying to strangle him! The whole mess finishes with Lung and the girl-boss duking it out before he blinds her.... nice touch Bruce!

This is one crazy film that's worth seeing just for the midget fighters; you'll laugh... not a lot mind you, but you'll laugh at the sheer audaciousness of it all!

Fist of Fury

The Continuing Saga

Of the films of the late Bruce Lee, his second film for Golden Harvest Studios has been the oft-used subject of sequels, remakes continuations and re-interpretations.

FIST OF FURY II Bruce Li's finest hour sees him star as Chen San, the brother of the fallen hero of the first film. Li travels to Shanghai to exact revenge for the death of his sibling and re-establish the Ching Wu school.

FIST OF FURY III Bruce Li's Chen San returns home to Macau to find more evil Japanese terrorizing his village. When they frame him for murder his fists are unleashed again.

NEW FIST OF FURY The remaining students of the Ching Wu school flee to Taiwan after the death of Chen, only to find more Japanese oppression. A certain young man by the name of Jackie Chan comes to the rescue.

LAST FIST OF FURY (seen in *The Real Bruce Lee*).

Dragon Lee's Ching Wu (Taekwondo?) school is once again terrorized by the Japanese and a Russian mercenary (James Nam) in a Korean setting.

BRUCE AND SHAOLIN KUNG FU

(Parts 1 and 2) This time Bruce Le stars as Chen's brother, battling a Japanese army commander and his troops in China and Korea.



Film Credits and Alternate Titles

The following credits for these films are based on the International versions. In Asian regions they could be somewhat different depending on the versions for that territory. Most of the alternate titles are those found in English speaking regions.

A FISTFUL OF YEN

(Segment from *The Kentucky Fried Movie*)

Cast: Evan Kim, Master Bong Soo Han, Phillip Rhee, Chong Lee, Simon Rhee

Producer: Jerry Zucker and Jim Abrahams

Director: John Landis

KFM Films, 1977

BIG BOSS UNTOUCHABLE

Cast: Dragon Sek, Karen Cheung, Ben Ng, Lawrence Wong

Producer: Joseph Lai and Ricky Wong

Director: Kant Leung

Active Filming, 2002



BLIND FIST OF BRUCE

Cast: Bruce Li, Simon Yuen Siu Tien, Tiger Yang, Chaing Tao

Producer: Luk Siu Yee

Director: Kam Bo

Kuk Bong Distributors, 1979

BRUCE LEE A DRAGON STORY (aka **THE BRUCE LEE STORY** – UK)

Cast: Bruce Li, Tang Pei, Cheung Tai Wai

Producer: Cheung Tai Wai

Director: Lu Ban Cheung

1976

BRUCE LEE AGAINST SUPERMEN (aka **SUPERDRAGON VERSUS SUPERMAN**)

Cast: Bruce Li, Lung Fei, San Mao, Lu Lu Wen

Producer: Wu Men Chao and Jimmy Shaw

Director: Chia Chun Wu

Alpha Motion Pictures, 1976

Picture Gallery

