

FROM THE PRODUCERS OF 'CRASH' AND 'SIDEWAYS!'

The New York Times, Stephen Holden

**"ROUSES YOUR BELIEF IN THE
MIRACULOUS! TEASES YOU
UNTIL THE VERY END!"**

ELLE, Karen Durbin

**"THRILLING AND
INGENIOUS!"**

NBC
"REEL TALK", Jeffrey Lyons

"OSCAR® CALIBER!"

EDWARD NORTON PAUL GIAMATTI AND JESSICA BIEL

THE ILLUSIONIST

NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS.

SCREENPLAY BY NEIL BURGER DIRECTED BY NEIL BURGER

www.TheIllusionist.com

PG-13

DIPSON
MCKINLEY 6
MCKINLEY & MILE STRIP RDS.
824-3479

REGAL
ELMWOOD CTR. 16
2001 ELMWOOD AVE.
800-FANDANGO/273

REGAL
TRANSIT CENTER 18
TRANSIT & WEHRLE DR.
800-FANDANGO/281

DIPSON
AMHERST
UNIVERSITY PLAZA
834-7655



Tony Jaa in *The Protector*

JAA LOVE

The Protector

review by M. Faust

TOBY KEITH & KELLY PRESTON
BROKEN BRIDGES
SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO GO BACK
TO MOVE FORWARD.

PG-13

SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE AT CMT.COM AND WHEREVER MUSIC IS SOLD

STARTS FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH!

REGAL QUAKER CROSSING 18
3450 AMELIA
800-FANDANGO/277

REGAL TRANSIT CENTER 18
TRANSIT & WEHRLE DR.
800-FANDANGO/281

SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT - NO PASSES OR DISCOUNT TICKETS ACCEPTED

Having been more than usually stressed of late, I attended the screening of what was billed as a new film starring Thai kickboxing sensation Tony Jaa without realizing that I had already seen it. *The Protector* is actually a retitled version of 2005's *Tom Yum Goong*, a.k.a. *Honour of the Beast*, which has been available as an import DVD for well over a year. But because it's an entertaining film, a worthy followup to Jaa's hit *Ong Bak*, I settled in to watch it and see what changes the Weinstein brothers might have wrought upon it. (At Miramax, the Weinsteins—stop me if you've heard this—were notorious for putting their "personal stamp" on foreign films they acquired for American distribution by heavily reediting, redubbing and rescoring them.)

The Protector (which ironically shares the title of an early Jackie Chan attempt at American crossover, the failure of which sent him back to Hong Kong in the early 1980s and sparked his best work) is missing about 25 minutes of footage, mostly comic relief and scenes that flesh out the plot and characters. In a martial arts film like this, that's not always the worst thing in the world, at least from a box-office standpoint: Hardcore fans may squawk, but the bulk of the market only cares that the action scenes are intact.

And *The Protector* is almost wall-to-wall action, broken up by the barest fragments of storyline. Still, one has to wonder why the Weinsteins chose to remove any references to the fact that Madame Rose, the "villainess" of the piece, is a transsexual, played in over the top style by former Shanghai Ballet star (and real-life transsexual) Jin Xing. You'd certainly think that presenter Quentin Tarantino, the world's most prominent fan of this kind of movie, would have recognized her as an homage to his own homages *Kill Bill*.

The biggest sin the American release commits is less forgivable. The print I viewed is so murky and washed out as to look like a cheapo 1970s blaxploitation movie, shot on low-grade film stock. This is not the case with the original film, which is as crisp and vivid as any modern film shot by professional photographers. (One internet source suggests that the Weinsteins acquired an intermediate print from a French source rather than using the original

materials to prepare their release.) Even by the Weinsteins' low standards, it's shockingly shabby treatment of product and an act of real disrespect to filmmakers.

The bottom line, though, is that *The Protector* is still a hell of a lot of fun. Jaa plays a Thai native whose tribe has historically been protectors of elephants, considered sacred in Thai culture. When his father is killed and two of their prized elephants are kidnapped, he tracks them to Sydney Australia, where he uncovers a ring of gangsters whose illicit enterprises include a restaurant whose menu specializes in endangered species.

Well, "uncover" is perhaps not the best word. A Thai-born Australian cop does most of the actual uncovering; Jaa's role is pretty much limited to shouting "You killed my father!" before plowing into the bad guys, who always either outnumber him or outsize him. (His most fearsome opponent, Australian strongman Nathan "Megaman" Jones, is 15 inches taller than Jaa.)

Jaa's fighting style brings the phrase "whirling dervish" to mind, as well as the word "ouch." He's prone to making human wishbones of his opponents (who also just happen to be accomplished kickboxers), and the editor responsible for dubbing in the sounds of breaking bones seems to have been working on a piece rate.

But this is mayhem as a demonstration of real athletic and acrobatic skill. Director Prachya Pinkaew, Jaa's regular collaborator, makes a point of emphasizing that these skills are real—you gotta be impressed by a guy who can kick out the globe on a 12-foot-high streetlamp from a standing start. And Jaa, who choreographed his own fight scenes, offers open homages to Bruce Lee, Jet Li and Jackie Chan (who has a cameo appearance bumping into Jaa on his arrival in Australia). The most astonishing sequence comes halfway through the film as Jaa assaults the restaurant/bordello in a four-minute unbroken take shot with a single camera that is a miracle of organization.

Guilty pleasures don't get much better than this.

MONDO VIDEO

NOW OPEN in the University Heights!

3268 Main Street
at Englewood, near Shango, Ming Café and Amy's Place

Open daily noon to 9pm. 716-881-1953

Movies you won't find *anywhere else!*