

Film review – hero – swordplay of the thinking mind



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What makes a hero? Does one have to be on the side of the law? Does one have to win their way to glory through the death of the enemy? This movie certainly answers these questions. Hero is a journey of what defines a hero, a journey not only to find answers but to see further into one's self. Thought to be the stereotypical " slash-and-gash" martial arts or wuxia film, this film concentrates on the further meaning of the word " Hero", which is highly unlikely in the genre it categorizes because it is involved as much as with human nature and thinking as it is with martial arts combat. Set in Ancient China at a time where the most violent conquerors reign supreme, the film was also unusually shot in China too. It features great scenes and surreal combats that surpassed all my expectations in a martial arts film, especially as this film is consciously about what is worth fighting for or possibly killing someone for. As I have said, the film is set in Ancient China at its most violent and blood-stained time.

The film follows the story of a supernaturally-skilled and fearless man called " Nameless" and his journey that involves him on a mission of revenge against the fearsome army that has massacred his people, led by the Emperor Qin himself. To achieve the justice he seeks, Nameless takes on the most ruthless assassins in the land, Sky, Flying Snow and Broken Sword, to reach the enemy he has sworn to defeat. The story of his journey is told in a retrospective way. At first, this is very confusing as there are many flashbacks in the film, each of which tells a different story, and each is brilliantly represented in a colour scheme, depending on the focus of the flashback (vengeance= red, honour= blue, etc.).

All these flashbacks are concerned with every aspect of how one attains the soul-being of a warrior and possibly that of a hero. It might be confusing at first but eventually the events all fall into place as these annoying yet interesting twists and turns end up pointing in one direction, to the definition of a true hero. The cast is composed of the most skilled actors, known either locally or internationally. Nameless, a wildcard, as he is capable of doing either good or evil, is portrayed by the world famous martial arts actor, Jet Li. Then there are the three assassins: Sky, a "Robin Hood" character, is portrayed by long-time martial arts expert Donnie Yen, Flying Snow, a vengeful individual, by drama actress Maggie Cheung, and Broken Sword, the wise one, by actor Tony Leung.

Lastly, the Emperor Qin, the Misunderstood, is played by veteran actor Chen Dao Ming. All of them were "drama" actors before and, except for Jet Li and Donnie Yen, have no experience in martial arts whatsoever. This leads to many surprises and interesting twists. Even though most of them are inexperienced in the field of martial arts, they portray their characters so well that the characters themselves seem to be like everyday people, confused and misunderstood, except for the fact that they are as skilled with the sword as we are with the remote. Then they are our everyday people.

Of all the surprises in the film, the character we expect to be least sympathetic is the antagonist, the brutal conqueror Emperor Qin, as he too undergoes a battle of conscience concerning the greater good. We find him sympathetic because his life depends on the choice of the main character, Nameless. All characters both embrace the way of the sword and the way of the human soul as their performances involve scenes of sub-conscious

combat, a fight between their conscience and their physical being at the same time. No movie before has ever had this kind of artistry and therefore obviously catches the attention of the audience.

The director of the film has done a tremendous job as well. Despite the fact that, like most of the cast, he is also a “drama” director, this film is his first in the martial arts genre. He has created a masterpiece even though he has limited knowledge in this field. It is a masterpiece because of the scenes in the film which are like paintings in motion. Like a museum painting, not only does it look good but it also makes you think beyond what you see.

The scenes with two women sword fighting for the one they both love in a golden-glazed forest, or the sub-conscious battle of honour between men on a lake as still as a mirror are just two stunning examples. These artistic depictions are supported by the director as he uses the camera to focus on things that we always seem to miss in a scene, things like how the wind blows or how the river flows, which is an ingenious visual representation of the human conscience. The soundtracks used in the scenes of the film are influenced by traditional Chinese music. Each scene contains a different piece written by the best Chinese orchestral composers specifically to fit and enhance the mood of the scene. The music enhances the depth of the scenes even further.

There is definitely no other movie like this. It might be confusing but it will surprise you at the end when you least expect it, the only kind present in this particular film. I highly recommend this to everyone of all ages, especially those who are not sure what to believe in. It is an enjoyable and truly

remarkable film of love, honour and integrity. It just proves that anyone can be a hero and that includes you.