

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Film: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Starring: Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, Chang Chen, Sihung Lung, Cheng Pei-Pei

Director: Ang Lee

Screenwriter: James Schamus, Wang Hui-Ling, Tsai Kuo-Jung

Producer: Ang Lee, Bill Kong, Hsu Li-kong

Genre: Romance, Adventure

Rating: PG13

Time: 119 minutes

Year: 2000

One of the greatest movie experiences I've ever had in my life.

September 10, 2000: A traditionally made wuxia (Chinese martial arts) film, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is premiering as a gala presentation at the Toronto International Film Festival. It's one of the hottest tickets of the event, which basically means that tickets are sold out before you can even try to get any. From what I can gather from the crowd, the chicks are here for the love story, the guys wanna see the fights. I am here for both, and also for the two stars, Michelle Yeoh and Chow Yun Fat. They are huge superstars in Hong Kong, but sadly, haven't been used to their fullest potential since coming to the States. I love to entertain the idea that these actors thought, "To hell with Hollywood!" and went back home to their roots (or at least, to Taiwan) to work with Ang Lee (Sense and Sensibility, The Ice Storm), a versatile director whose American films have actually had much success in the Western world.

With a lot of waiting (3 1/2 hours) and a little luck, I manage to creep into the theatre to fill an empty seat that belonged to one of the corporate sponsors. About six rows ahead of me, Ang Lee is already on stage introducing his film. He finishes off his speech by saying: "I hope you like it". Boy, I think that's the understatement of the year.



Plot-wise, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is standard kung fu melodrama: Chow Yun Fat is Li Mu Bai, a great warrior of the Wutan form of martial arts and swordplay. Not only is he burdened with a mission to avenge the death of his Master, he is also bound by honour to deny his love for his best friend, Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh). Mu Bai gives Shu Lien his beloved sword, The Green Destiny, and asks her to deliver it to Sir Te (Lung Sihung), a well-respected leader and friend to her father. When Shu Lien visits Sir Te, she meets some of his house guests, namely Jen (Zhang Ziyi), the young daughter of a governor who is stuck in a pre-arranged marriage that she wants no part of. As soon as the sword is placed on display, it gets stolen. Everyone else thinks this is the doing of Jade Fox, arch-nemesis of Li Mu Bai's. Shu Lien, however, is pretty sure it has something to do with Jen. The story follows Mu Bai and Shu Lien's chase to regain possession of the sword.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is beautiful in more ways than one. It navigates the diverse landscapes of mainland China, from the Gobi desert to the southern Bamboo Forest to the ancient metropolis of Peking. In addition to the scenery, the strength of this film lies in the human connections. The repressed feelings and emotions of every single character is what truly puts it on the top of Chinese cinema, regardless of the conventional kung-fu storyline. The movie is filmed in Mandarin and subtitled in English. This is something to note because Chow Yun Fat and Michelle Yeoh speak Cantonese. They are basically performing in a language completely foreign to them, which obviously, is no easy feat. I'm not really up on my Mandarin, but I heard no complaints from the audience over their diction.

Yeah, yeah yeah... plot, scenery, pronunciation, whatever. Don't worry, folks. Twenty minutes into the film, everyone gets what they're waiting for -- the first action sequence! I simply cannot describe this scene with words and do it justice. Let's just say that a gravity-defying masked figure makes a long, extended escape with the Green Destiny by running up walls and bounding from rooftop to rooftop with feather-light feet. Shu Lien gives chase and catches up, leading into masterful "Kung Fu Fight #1". As this sequence concludes, the audience I'm in goes completely nuts! We applaud so loudly that we miss the first parts of dialogue from the next scene. I am literally grinning from ear to ear. This is what movies are all about.



In fact, the biggest highlight of the film comes during a final stand-off between Yeoh and Ziyi. These two women are very pissed off at each other and find themselves in, of all places, a training room full of weapons. As they pull out their swords, on guard, some guy in audience hollers out a hearty, "Oooooohhh yeah!!!!". The crowd is fully in agreement and claps in anticipation. How's that for a great example of the collective movie experience? This dude has just voiced exactly how every single person in the theatre is feeling. For that very reason, this is a movie that must be seen in on the big screen.



These much lauded battle scenes are choreographed by Yuen Wo-Ping, the man behind The Matrix fights. Now, being Chinese and all, I've been subjected to a good share of no-budget martial arts films (both good and horrendous) since early childhood. I have never cared much for wire-stunt fighting, even in Jet Li's movies. When you watch a good kung fu movie, you watch for just that -- good fighting. I'm not just talking about people beating the snot out of each other, but style, quickness, excitement, acrobatics. I tend to be less impressed with someone hanging up on wires. It marginalizes any actual fighting skills they may have and it becomes more about spectacle and exaggerated perspectives.

When a character stiffly jump 20 feet in the air to kick someone, then completes the move with a little flip over a two-story house, I just roll my eyes. People just do not move that way (there is usually no explanation for their super-human strength). It just plain looks hokey.

So why did wire-stunt work so well with The Matrix? Because there was an actual story there to support it! Keanu Reeves was bouncing off the walls in a world that he realized was not real. For him, the laws of gravity did not apply. Thankfully, this holds true for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon as well, because it is established from early on that all these Wutan warriors have trained to control this special jumping/flying ability. The policemen, guards and governors are mere mortals and cannot perform any these kinds of acrobatics. And from a technical standpoint, the effects are done brilliantly. The camera work is not flashy -- it simply flows with the action, sometimes from room to room in very long takes. The characters flow so effortlessly, gracefully and naturally that I dare anyone to in the theatre to say that they are not completely caught up in this dreamy, logic-suspending, disbelief-suspending world.

Actually, there is only one moment where I think these wire-effects wane. It is during a flying chase through a forest, resulting in a sword fight between Jen and Mu Bai on the tops of two trees. The situation is almost laughable. They are so obviously being held up by something, that my suspension of disbelief falters a little. What saves the scene though, is that Lee never lets the action get away from him. In between the long shots of warriors wobbly balancing on tree branches, he cuts in long close ups of Mu Bai and Jen's serious faces, swaying in and out of frame. As they stare into each other's eyes trying to figure each other out, it's the performances (and the excellent score) that take the scene over from the special effects. This is much more than just a swordfighting flick.



Speaking of performances, I bow down to Michelle Yeoh. She simply shines as Shu Lien -- a humble warrior with strength, compassion, intuition and hundreds of other notable attributes. I cried for her during the end of this film. Not because she has the most beautiful finishing move or roundhouse kick, but because she is a

damn fine actress and she made my heart ache for her. As she did in to James Bond in Tomorrow Never Dies and even Jackie Chan in Supercop, she almost steals the show again here.

Almost, I say. Ultimately, this is Zhang Ziyi's movie to carry. Her character, Jen is by far the most complicated (not to mention the showiest fighter). She starts off as an overconfident, bratty kid and grows into a more humbled, wise young woman. She is the "Hidden Dragon" of the title, although this might be hard for some to recognize from the English translation. Her character's full name is Yu Jiao Long, meaning the "Nimble Jade Dragon". The Mongol bandit she falls in love with is named Lo (according to the English subtitles), but this was shortened from Lo Xiao Hu, meaning "Little Tiger". Some people have criticized Ang Lee for veering the film off into a long, extended flashback of Jen and Lo's love affair in the Gobi desert, but clearly, their relationship is the real heart of the entire movie. And although the ending is tragic, it is not dark or cynical or scornful. In fact, it is refreshingly sincere and honest; its themes so very simple -- the pursuit of true love and of righting wrongs, and to be true to oneself.

As Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon fades to black and the end credits begin to roll, I am trying to wipe away my tears. Before I can ask myself, "Why the hell am I crying in a kung-fu movie?!", the audience once again erupts with cheers. I am one of the first to get up from my seat as we give Ang Lee a long, well-deserved standing ovation. Five stars! Two thumbs up! Hell, I give it Eleven Freakin' Hours (but for the record, we have no specific rating system)! What more is there to say, dear readers, than: "For the love of God, go see this movie!"

DROOL FACTOR: Whether he's got a gun or a big green sword in his pocket, Chow Yun Fat always exudes coolness. I've always had a thing for him, particularly decked out in a nice black suit, dark shades and showing off that sexy grin of his. However... Chow Yun Fat all serious and bald and wearing a burlap sack with sandals doesn't quite have the same effect. The one I found myself drooling over was actually the young, charismatic Chen Chang (Lo). Apart from his inability to grow substantial facial hair (read: cheesy goatee), he's got quite the pretty face.

GROSS-OUT FACTOR: This is cartoon kung-fu violence. Your eyes will already be in sensory overload anyway -- everything goes so fast that it's a little difficult for one to be able to register any fight-inflicted pain or agony. Well... there is one nasty Penetrating Blow to the Head By a Giant Sized Ninja Star Thingy that made me grimace. But, Lee mercifully chooses to leave out the blood that you'd normally associate with that kind of severe death.

STRONG CHICK FACTOR: Is there an award for the Strongest Chick Ensemble in a Movie? If there isn't, then there should be and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon should win it. This is a movie about women -- their concerns, their feelings and how ineffectual their men can often be. Virtually every complex battle scene involves one of the female leads either kicking some guy's ass, or else battling it out between themselves. I've already sung the praises of Yeoh and Ziyi's characters, but even the toughest, meanest Bad Guy is a woman. And when you think about it, the reason this villain, Jade Fox, went to the dark side in the first place, was because the masters of Wutan refused to accept women as disciples to their teachings! To paraphrase Jade, Li Bu Tai's master thought she was good enough to fuck, but not worthy enough to be taught to fight. I think I'd be a little bitter too. If the Wutan masters weren't such a bunch of chauvinist pigs, all this trouble could have been avoided.

-- Julie Ng

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon movie reviews & Metacritic score: In 19th century China, a magical sword given by a warrior (Chow Yun-Fat) to his lover (Michelle Yeoh) Log in to finish your rating Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. 8.1. Your Score. 8.1. User Score. Universal acclaim based on 641 Ratings. Your score has been saved for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. In many ways, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon is pure Wu Xia. But it has also re-invented the genre and given it artistic credibility. The greatest joy of the film is watching great Hong Kong stars like Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh being given characters with depth – and watching them fill the screen with their performances. The film also benefits from great performances from Zhang Ziyi and a very under-rated Chang Chen. Quite simply, Crouching Tiger has everything. It is beautiful, breathtaking and deeply moving. 9½ /10. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. 152,937 likes · 49 talking about this. Film. Ang Lee spoke to EW about making his Oscar-winning martial arts epic 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' for its 20th anniversary. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. 11 December 2020. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny (Chinese: 卧虎藏龙—续集) is a 2016 American-Chinese wuxia film directed by Yuen Woo-ping and written by John Fusco, based on the novel Iron Knight, Silver Vase by Wang Dulu. It is also a sequel to the 2000 film Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. The film stars Donnie Yen, Michelle Yeoh, Harry Shum Jr., Jason Scott Lee, Roger Yuan, Woon Young Park, Eugenia Yuan, JuJu Chan, Chris Pang, Veronica Ngo, Shuya Chang and Natasha Liu Bordizzo. The film was released in...