



On the rise

Chinese actress Monica Mok spoke with the 'Taipei Times' about the fun and pain of making 'Ocean Flame'

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Appearing delightfully spunky and full of merriment at a press conference held one week before the Golden Horse Awards (金馬獎), it was difficult to associate Chinese actress Monica Mok (莫小奇) with the corrupt character she plays in Liu Fendou's (劉奮鬥) second feature, *Ocean Flame* (一半海水一半火).

Mok was sent by her parents to attend high school in Australia. After obtaining a master's degree in finance, she returned to China in 2004 to pursue acting.

Mok tackled her first leading role in *Ocean Flame*. Her performance won a nomination in the Best Leading Actress category at this year's Golden Horse awards.

Taipei Times: How do you feel about being nominated for the Golden Horse awards?

Monica Mok: It just feels magical!

TT: What attracted you to the project?

MM: Before the movie, Liao [Fan (廖凡), her co-star in *Ocean Flame*] and I were nodding acquaintances. One day he called me up and said, "Liu saw you on television. He wants you to audition for a role." I went, knowing absolutely nothing about the project or the novel. After the audition, they said to me "don't go. Stay."

TT: You didn't hesitate?

MM: Yeah, actors never turn down offers [laughing]. It never occurred to me that I might not be cut out for the job. At that time, I thought there was no way I couldn't play the role. It wasn't until I was actually on the set that I felt I really could not [laughing].

TT: Did you find the sex scenes a challenge?

MM: Actually, it was Liao who felt embarrassed because he is gentle and a bit shy in real life. I took the lead to take off his clothes [laughing]. If I acted abashed and uncomfortable, people would ask why I took the part. On the contrary, if I acted like there was nothing to feel awkward about, I would earn respect from the crew.

(Based on renowned Chinese writer Wang Shuo's (王朔) novel of the same title, *Ocean Flame* tells the tale of a tortured love affair between small-time criminal Wang Yao and innocent waitress Li Chun. Geared to art-house moviegoers, the film received polarizing reviews for its overwrought, if not completely staged, emotions and excessively violent and twisted portrait of passion, desire and love. The film garnered five nominations at this year's Golden Horse, including nominations for Best Actress, Best Feature Film, Best Cinematography and Best Art Direction categories.)



Monica Mok, left, didn't know what *Ocean Flame* was about when she auditioned for the movie. The result earned her a Golden Horse nomination and the film mixed reviews.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FILMO PICTURES

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

[TECHNOLOGY REVIEWS]

The omega eGo Helium portable hard drive.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



AN ETHEREAL EXTERNAL DRIVE TO GO WITH AN AIRY LAPTOP

MacBook Air owners are drawn to the laptop's thin frame and light weight, so the last thing they want is a svelte laptop with chunky peripherals. Omega had this in mind when it created the eGo Helium USB 2.0 portable hard drive.

The 6.4cm eGo (compatible with Mac OS X 10.1.5 or above and Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional, XP and Vista) mirrors the Air's aesthetics, from its own light weight (198g) to its equally barely there frame (1.6cm thick). The 320-gigabyte hard drive, which is available now and costs US\$150, comes formatted with Apple's HFS(PLUS) file system and can store 1,280,000 photos and more than 5,920 hours of music.

And to help keep your online data secure, Omega has incorporated an

online data backup service through a third-party supplier, Mozy.

Given the possibility that you could lose a hard drive this small, that's not a bad idea.



The HTC Touch Pro.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

WINDOWS MOBILE, AT HOME IN A COOL SMARTPHONE

Poor Windows Mobile. With the world's attention on Google and Apple, Microsoft's tried-and-true mobile operating system for smartphones is being ignored. Luckily, manufacturers like HTC are putting Windows Mobile on cooler hardware like the Touch Pro.

The HTC Touch Pro is a 2.8-inch touch-screen smartphone with full fold-out keyboard. It hides Windows Mobile's staid user interface behind HTC's TouchFlo interface, which supports gestures to scroll back and forth through programs like a media player and Web

browser. The phone has a 3.2-megapixel camera and microSD card slot. It also includes a GPS sensor and mapping software along with Wi-Fi. TV-out functionality lets you play video and display images on a nearby television.

The phone supports high-speed cellular networking on both carriers. As Androids and iPhones draw cell phone shoppers this month, it's nice to see some new action from the old standbys.



The Alesis ProTrack handheld recorder for the iPod.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

A POCKET-SIZE RECORDING STUDIO, PLAYING OFF THE IPOD

Touch, shuffle, tap. These are some of the verbs commonly associated with the iPod. The audio manufacturer Alesis is hoping to add another: record. The company has introduced the ProTrack, which it bills as "the world's first professional hand-held digital stereo

recorder for iPod."

The ProTrack lets users record live audio on their iPod (Classic or 5th Generation) or iPod Nano (2nd or 3rd Generation) via an integrated recorder with two microphones. Other features include a universal dock and LED signal indicators. Four AAA batteries provide up to five hours of recording time. The ProTrack's tripod mount can help enhance recording quality. The ProTrack will cost around US\$200 and will be available in early January.



The Neuros Link internet-video TV link.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

YOUTUBE AND HULU VISIT THE LIVING ROOM

Bringing Web-based video content to the living room has been a dream of desk jockeys everywhere. While watching Hulu.com or YouTube on a laptop is fine, sitting on the couch and watching a dog on a skateboard has a

certain indolent appeal.

The Neuros Link is a device that connects to a television via an HDMI cable and can stream Web video to any HD display. The device requires a broadband connection and little else: There is no subscription fee, because the device brings in free content from the Internet.

The software also streams your own video, audio and photos from other computers over the TV and plays them back at 1,080-pixel resolution with six-channel audio. It includes an optical audio output and 802.11g Wi-Fi as well as a remote keyboard for easy content browsing.

The box costs US\$299, and the software and interface is completely open source — users can dig around and modify both software and hardware. While most of us might not want to solder bolt features to our home entertainment centers, it's nice to know we could.

IF ONE USB CHARGING PORT IS GOOD, FOUR MUST BE GREAT

After extensive inquiry, Kensington has discovered that a charger with four USB ports with which to power up cell phones, iPods and other devices is far superior to standard single-port



The Kensington four-port USB charger.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

models. Its US\$30 four-port charger is about as big as a standard USB charger — the kind that comes with almost every gadget these days — but it can charge multiple devices at once, so users don't have to carry a tangle of adapters, chargers and cables on their next business trip.

The charger works with iPods, iPhones, BlackBerry smartphones and other devices and sends 5 DC volts. It weighs about 113g and is compatible with American and overseas current, which means you need only a plug adapter rather than a full transformer.

The device is available online and in stores. Kensington offers a two-year warranty, and the device is small enough that it doesn't block precious outlets in cybercafes or crowded offices.

What's next? No one is saying, but could there be a game-changing 11-port charger in the cards?

— NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE