

The master is back

Yuen Woo-ping returns to the director's chair after a 13-year hiatus with 'True Legend'

Film Notes

TRUE LEGEND 蘇乞兒

DIRECTED BY:
YUEN WOO-PING (袁和平)

STARRING:
VINCENT ZHAO (趙文卓) AS SU CAN,
ZHOU XUN (周迅) AS YUAN YING,
ANDY ON (安志杰) AS YUAN LIE,
JAY CHOU (周杰倫) AS LORD OF
WUSHU, GORDON LIU (劉家輝)
AS OLD SAGE

RUNNING TIME:
116 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND
ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY



BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Revered as the ultimate action choreographer and known for his contributions to *The Matrix*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (臥虎藏龍) and the *Kill Bill* films, Yuen Woo-ping (袁和平) returns to the director's chair after a 13-year hiatus with *True Legend* (蘇乞兒).

The doyen of onscreen *wuxia* (武俠), or Chinese martial-arts literature, Yuen revisits the legend he is most familiar with. Both his 1978 masterpiece *Drunken Master* (醉拳) and 1993's *Heroes Among Heroes* (蘇乞兒) explore the life of Su Can (蘇燦), better known as Beggar Su (蘇乞兒), founder of the Drunken Fist (醉拳) wushu technique.

True Legend (蘇乞兒), which mixes first-rate choreography and romance to tell the story of Su's downfall and his transformation into a martial-arts master, is Yuen's third portrayal of the popular character.

Su, played by Vincent Zhao (趙文卓), is a family man who wants nothing more than to master martial arts and lead a peaceful life with

his wife Yuan Ying (Zhou Xun, 周迅) and their son. His evil foster brother Yuan Lie (Andy On, 安志杰), however, has other ideas.

Determined to avenge his biological father's accidental death, caused by Su's father, and get it on with his biological sister Yuan Ying, Yuan Lie masters the deadly Five Venom Fists (五毒拳) technique and unleashes it on Su.

The injured Su jumps in a river to escape, followed by his wife, leaving their son behind in the hope that the boy's uncle would do him no harm.

The seriously wounded Su and Yuan Ying are taken in by a herbal healer (Michelle Yeoh, 楊紫瓊) who lives in seclusion on a mountain.

With his spirit broken, Su turns to the bottle, but is gradually healed by Yuan Ying's unconditional love. The hero takes up training again, aided by two mysterious martial-arts gurus, Old Sage (Gordon Liu, 劉家輝) and the Lord of Wushu (Jay Chou, 周杰倫), who turn out to be Su's imaginary masters.

After three years, Yuan Ying visits her brother to beg him to return her son. Yuan Lie learns that Su is coming down the mountain to challenge



him, so he buries Yuan Ying alive in a wooden box — if he is killed the secret of her whereabouts and the chance to rescue her are lost.

Unaware of his wife's predicament and despite his son's protestations, Su slays Yuan Lie.

In the movie's second part, father and son wander the country aimlessly and end up at a town on the Chinese-Russian border, home to a group of Russian wrestlers who beat the living daylights out of Chinese contestants in fighting competitions they host.

Led by the late David Carradine, who does little more than growl "kill the Chinaman"

True Legend is packed with action almost all the way through, with fights and battles taking place in locations ranging from a deep well and underground dungeon to a gladiatorial arena.

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several times in one of his last screen appearances, the pugilists make mince meat of one of Su's old friends. Su steps in and the final fight scene unfurls.

Calling *True Legend* a *wuxia* rather than kung fu movie on the film's official Web site (though it is unclear how the two are distinguished), Yuen injects plenty of fantastical elements into the work's first part.

The characters display superhuman abilities supported by wirework, the mountain where our hero advances his martial-arts skills looks like it comes straight out of a Chinese ink painting, and the ravishing landscape provides a mythical realm where immortals dwell, in this case the otherworldly characters played by Liu and Chou.

The second segment shifts to solid kung fu action, reminiscent of *Fearless* (霍元甲), or any other film with Chinese martial artists

drubbing foreigners.

Though surprisingly innovative, yet not completely convincing, Yuen blends the Drunken Fist fighting style with street dance moves.

True Legend succeeds in mixing top-class martial-arts action with heartfelt romance. The female lead, played by the talented Zhou, is much more than the hero's dull love interest commonly found in the kung fu flick genre. She brings to life an ideal wife and mother who is a pillar of hope and strength, whereas the men are obsessed with their pursuit of wushu to the point of madness.

True Legend gives the unsung martial-arts actor Zhao the opportunity to shine. Once a rising action actor, Zhao retreated from the limelight. Su is his first film role in nine years. His comeback is competent enough to suggest he could follow in the footsteps of Donnie Yen (甄子丹), who found success at a late stage in his career.

The film's biggest letdown is the action sequences, which were shot in 3D. The technique comes across as a gimmick and detracts from the martial artists' hard-hitting, bone-crushing wushu prowess.