



# 20 MUST SEE MARTIAL ARTS MOVIES



# FROM THE LAST 20 YEARS

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**EVERY SINGLE PERSON INVOLVED  
MAKES THE MARTIAL ARTS ACTION  
MOVIE WEBSITE POSSIBLE...**

**...AND LOTS OF FUN!**

# BEFORE WE GET STUCK INTO IT.

*In the last 4 years, I have watched and reviewed close to 500 Martial Arts films.*

I've got to say it's a bit of an addiction but a fun one, and it's been shared with a lot of people through Social Media channels like Facebook and Twitter, and I've noticed a strong pattern in the movies people love to see these days.

On top of that, we're seeing movies being released that seem to be climbing the ladder in terms of quality. For a while, martial arts movies were heading in a different direction and focusing less on the pure abilities of the actor and relying heavily on wire work. While there's nothing wrong with that, I can safely say that most people I've networked with over the last few years don't enjoy the weightless "floating" look that most of these movies produced.

So most of what I write about these days focuses on the power of the individual martial artist, relying on themselves more than wires. Combined with the totality of the film making process, I've done my best to find the absolute most entertaining, action packed and well balanced martial arts films of recent times.

**So I produced this little Ebook for anyone whose looking to become immersed in the most action packed, adrenaline charged fight films from the last 20 years.**

Confining it to 20 movies was a difficult process but I wanted people to be charged up with every single movie they watched on this list as well as offering a decent amount of variety. The truth is that the best films (in my opinion) revolve around a handful of people, so the list has a lot of familiar faces.

So, using my personal experience and the opinions of the MAAM fanbase on Facebook & Twitter, I present the following list for you – The 20 movies from the last 20 Years that every Martial Arts fan should watch. Enjoy!

# SPL: Killzone

2005, Hong Kong

This movie has some of the best and most exciting martial arts fights ever caught on film. That's why I had to put it first!

This movie is about a group of police who have been doing absolutely anything, even breaking the law themselves, to bring down the most dangerous and notorious organized crime boss in Hong Kong – Sammo Hung's character Wong Po.

When the team's leader is forced into retirement from a head injury, we're introduced to Donnie Yen's character Inspector Ma Kwun, who takes over the team. As this happens the entire situation escalates and evidence that could put Wong Po away arises, so he sends out his hit man to kill everyone on the team.

**No Spoilers, you'll have to watch to see what happens!**

The film has a very dark and modern feel to it accompanied by a serious 'thriller' style of story telling. It's one of the most exciting martial arts films ever made.

## Who's in it?

This movie has 3 legends of martial arts cinema in key roles. One, Sammo already being a legend of the genre, whilst elevating Donnie Yen's Status and give the perfect career kick start for Jacky Wu Jing.

- Donnie Yen as Inspector Ma Kwun
- Sammo Hung as Wong Po
- Jacky Wu Jing as Jack – The Assassin.



# Ong Bak

2003, Thailand

his movie shook the ground of the movie industry right up and revived the entire movement of martial arts stunts with no wires and no CGI by showing off the sheer skill of the main actor performing at a level rivaled only by other legends of the industry.

I'm talking about Tony Jaa.

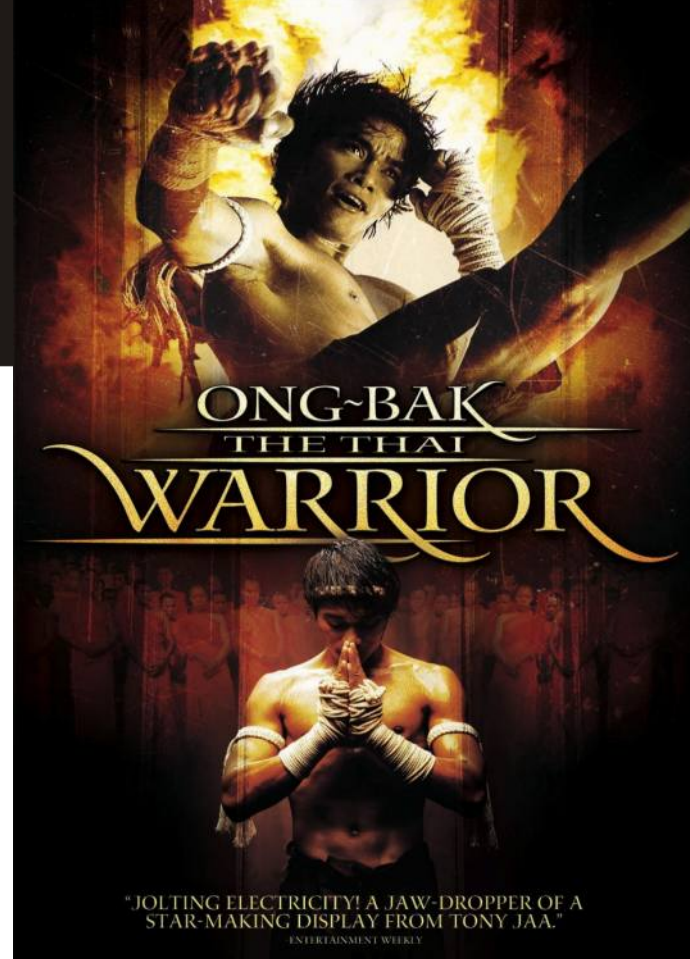
Ong Bak is about a boy named Ting, a villager who has grown up learning the deadly techniques of Muay Thai / Muay Boran. When a highly regarded statue is mutilated and its head removed from the village, the townsfolk prepare for terrible weather and poverty as this 'head of Ong Bak' brings them good luck and good weather for their farms.

So Ting heads off into the city to follow their only lead, a young man named Don, to get the head of Ong Bak and return it to the village and give the people hope again.

**Naturally he faces a lot of resistance and has to kick a lot of people's asses!**

As mentioned earlier, the physical performances of Tony Jaa are astounding and he performs them all using only himself and no special effects. The fights are exciting, brutal, and a shining example of what a good action packed martial arts film should be.

**This film launched the career of Tony Jaa and made him a martial arts icon.**



# Ip Man

2008, Hong Kong

This is a film that took an already popular martial arts actor and made him an even bigger star! I'm talking about Donnie Yen of course :)

Donnie Yen plays the famous Ip Man, the real life grandmaster of Wing Chun and instructor of the legendary Bruce Lee. We meet Master Ip and get a nice slice of action as we are introduced to his awesome fighting skills.

But things get really interesting when his town becomes occupied by the Japanese during the late 1930's. With his family struggling, poor and the entire town being a ruin of its former self, Master Ip does his best to survive whilst staying true to his morals. But he earns the attention of a Japanese general after he defeats 10 of his black belt students, making him a wanted man.

So Master Ip tries his best to evade capture from the Japanese, help the people of the town to defend themselves against a gang of thugs and gets into plenty of fights along the way – no surprises there.

This film tells a very entertaining story about hardship, moral character and even touches of the power of teaching martial arts. Donnie Yen not only acts the part well but portrays the art of Wing Chun in combat like never before, making it technical and exciting.

**If you want a movie with some fantastic action, martial arts technique and good plot, check out Ip Man.**

## Who's in this film?

- Donnie Yen as Ip Man
- Louis Fan as the Thug Kam Sam-chu
- Xing Yu as Master Lam Zealot



# The Raid: Redemption

2011, Indonesia

Just as Ong Bak put Thailand and Tony Jaa on the map of places to find awesome martial arts action movies, The Raid set a new standard for action films everywhere making Indonesia the new place to find awesome action.

At the same time, this film made Iko Uwais a martial arts movie star and made the film's writer, director and editor Gareth Evans a BIG name in the movie industry.

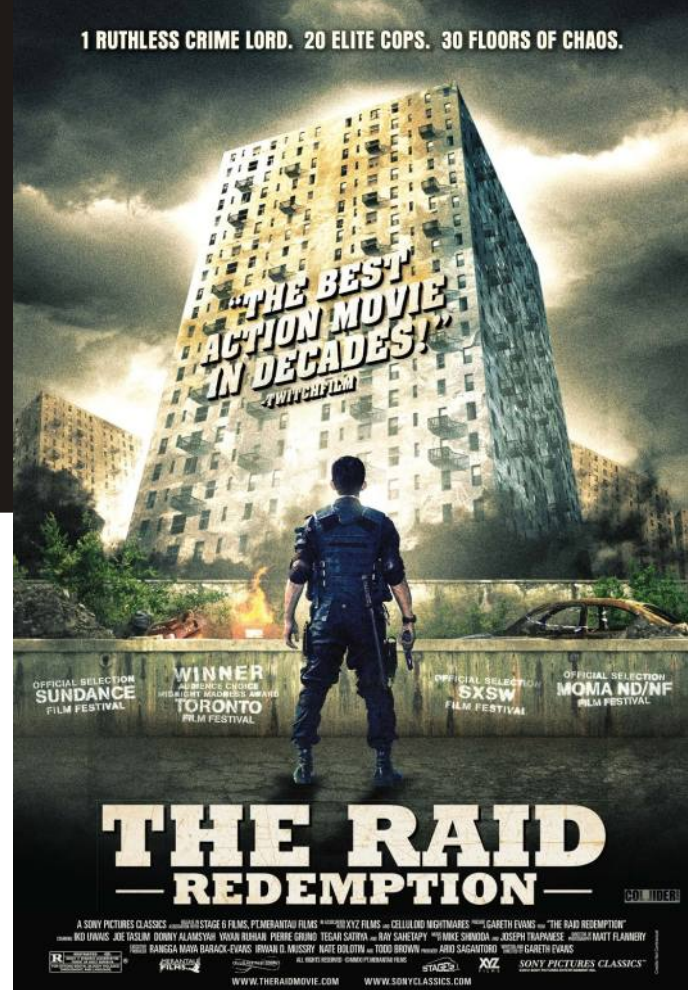
The premise is simple, a group of swat head into a building overrun by criminals, once discovered they are more or less trapped and must ascend the tower to it's top level, fighting off most of the building's very vicious tenants. One member of the swat team, Rama, is going in to find his brother who is one of the head criminals and bring him out safely.

The claustrophobic feeling of this film really sets a thrilling tone for this film but the action is on a whole new level. We're talking a super high intensity unlike what you've seen before, gone are fancy flips and spectacle moves and instead you get pure orchestrated violence that's both brutal and bloody.

These guys held nothing back when making this film.

## Who's in this film?

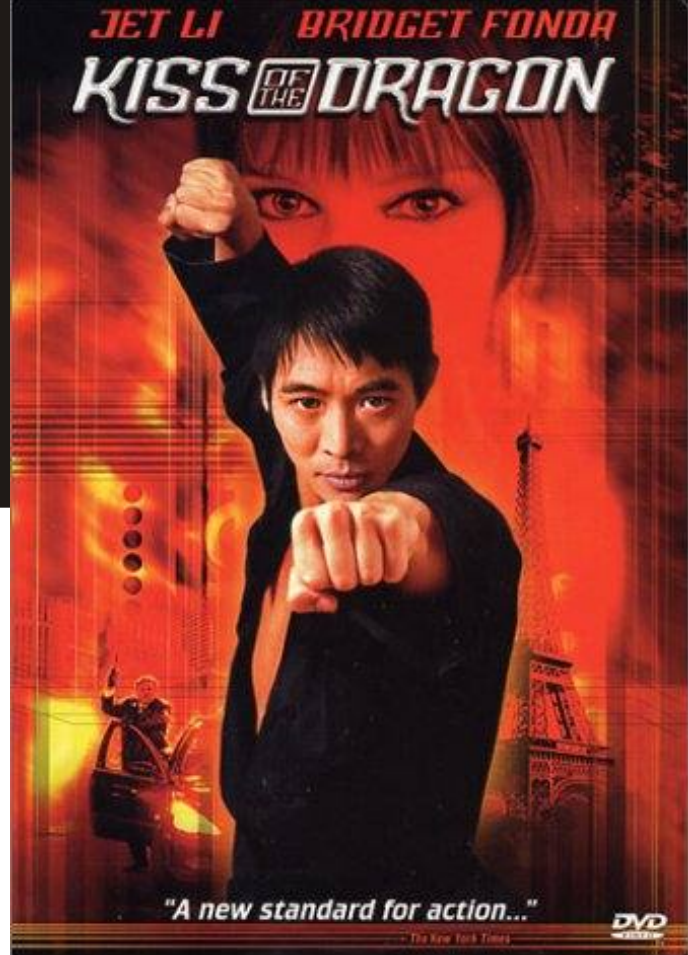
- Iko Uwais as Rama
- Joe Taslim as Jaka
- Yayan Ruhian as Mad Dog



# Kiss of the Dragon

2001, United States

When Jet Li became the next big martial arts movie star in the US (after appearing in Lethal Weapon 4), he did a string of Hollywood action films. Kiss of the Dragon was the movie he wanted to create that was serious and a bit more of a thriller in nature, whilst showing off his most lethal fight choreography.



**Jet Li really brings out his sharpest weapons in this film, including the (you guessed it) “Kiss of the Dragon” to finish things off.**

He plays a Hong Kong Intelligence agent “Johnny Boy” sent to Paris to help investigate a Chinese Gangster with the French Authorities. Suddenly the french authorities turn on him and try to kill him.

Johnny Boy meets a hooker whose child is being held by the head of the French police force that turned on him, so the two work together to get her child back, defeat the bad guy , etc, etc.

This film is packed with action, sprinkled nicely throughout the film and is among Jet Li’s very best work. This one is definitely worth checking out.

## Who is in this film?

- Jet Li as Johnny Boy
- Cyril Rfaelli as one of the Twins



# Drive

1997, United States

This is an all american Martial Arts film which shines as the perfect example of martial arts action...

**...combined with a somewhat silly story telling style.**

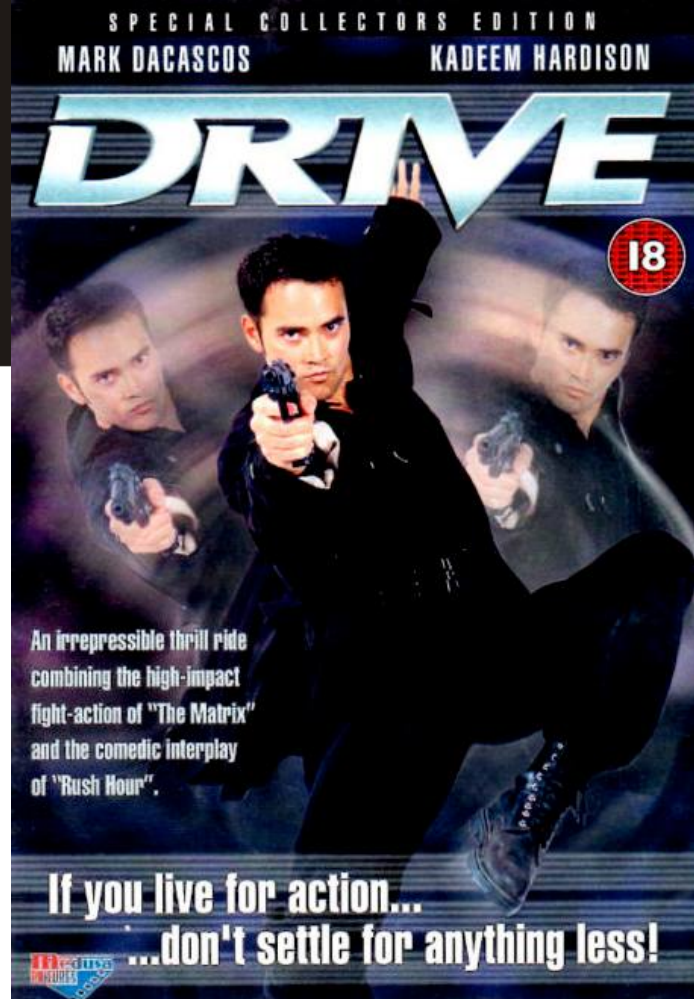
Mark Dacascos is Toby Wong, a kind of 'superhuman' who carries a chip designed to enhance the abilities of the person carrying it. The chip is a prototype and the inventors want it back and are chasing Toby across the world to get it and Toby fights for survival and keeps his pursuers 3 steps behind.

During an early confrontation Toby meets a young man named Malik Brody who gets caught up in the mess of things and ends up driving Toby wherever he wants to go, but soon enough another 'chipped' super soldier comes to take out Toby and anyone with him.

**So this movie is very cheesy , the characters, story telling and to some degree the acting all have a very dated 'cheap' 90's feel but this is severely overshadowed by the martial arts performance and action delivered by Mark Dacascos.**

Mark makes this film ridiculously entertaining and performs stunts at a level on par with the best martial arts performers in the history of cinema. It really must be seen to get an idea for what I'm talking about!

**This film is Mark Dacascos' best work.**



# The Raid 2: Berandal

2014, Indonesia

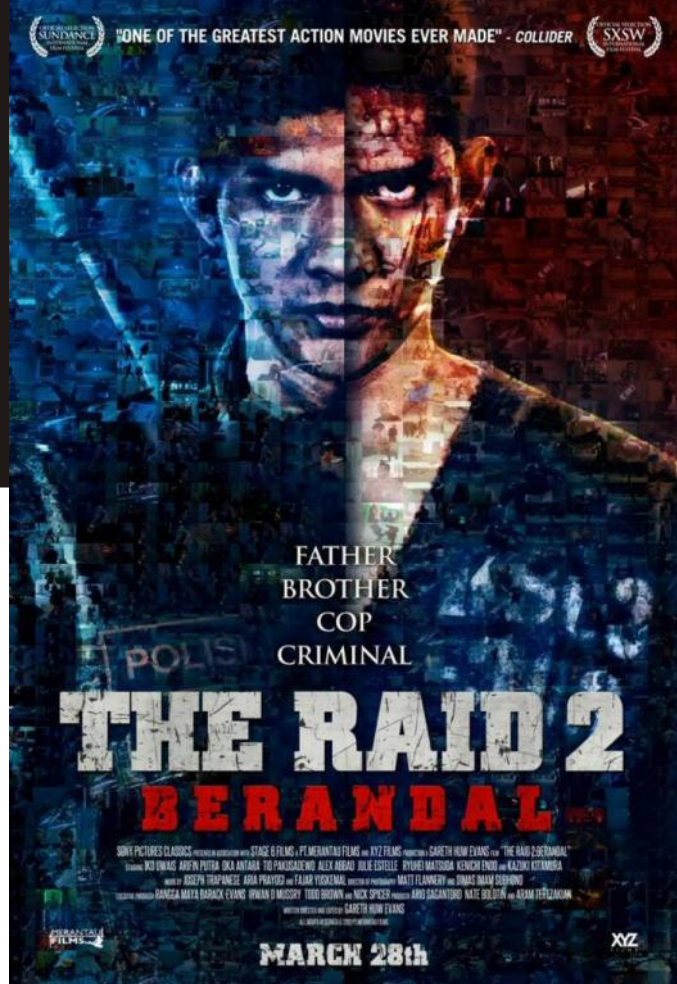
We've mentioned the first Raid film, now we'll look at the second. This film has many of the same actors with a few fresh faces popping up to make some rather interesting villains.

Iko Uwais' character Rama is not quite out of the mess yet and he must go undercover to destroy a large criminal organisation – which starts with him going into a vicious prison whilst fighting for survival and the trust of one man – the son of the crime boss whose gang Rama must infiltrate. Once out he starts his investigation but things get complicated and violent.

This film is much longer than the the first and was always intended to be the original film – but due to budget constraints Gareth Evans released the first Raid as a smaller budget film to hopefully gain the money he needed to fund this film. So this is Gareth Evans' baby!

While a longer film with the action more spread out, it's definitely worth the watch especially considering the epic and bloody finale which has Iko Uwais fighting some incredibly talented villains.

**Brutal, intense and full of martial arts action and violence – a must watch!**



# Undisputed 2: The Last Man Standing

2006, United States

Mixed Martial Arts has been on the rise for about 15 years now. One expression of this rise was this B Grade film that brought two actors into the martial arts mainstream.

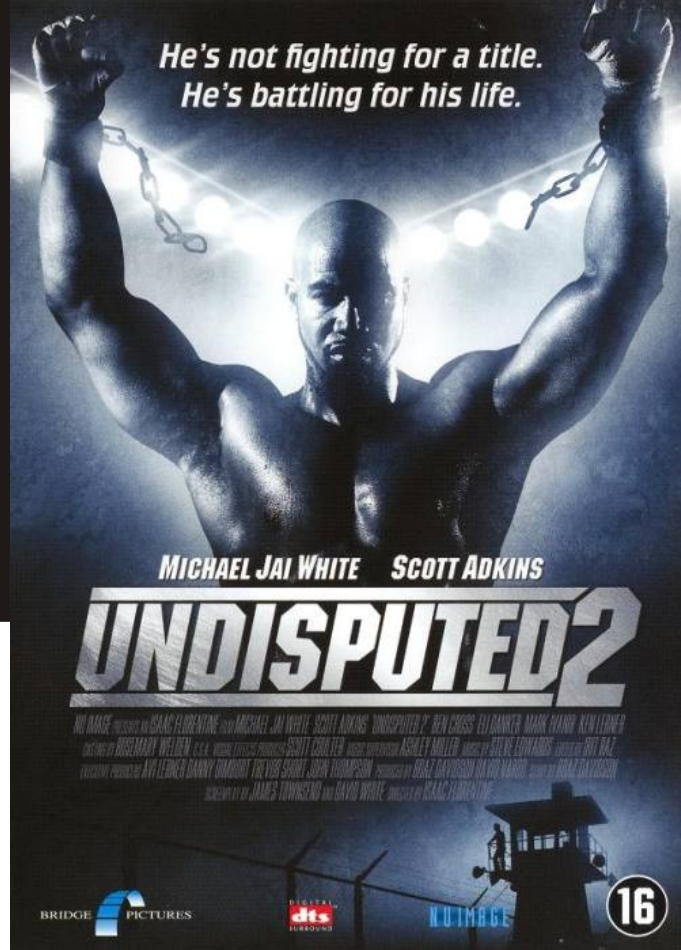
What about Undisputed '1'? Nah, you don't need it. Follow former World Champion Heavyweight boxer and Mike Tyson inspired character George Chambers, played by Michael Jai White, as he is set up and thrown into a Russian prison. The owner of the prison, wants him to fight Scott Adkins' character Boyka, his prison fighter who is an extremely dominant champion.

The catch is he must win in order to be set free. So Chambers trains hard to defeat the Russian Fighter who is self proclaimed "the most complete fighter in the world".

In this film we see some tremendous martial arts choreography and amazing movement from both Michale Jai White and Scott Adkins. We see the evolution of George's boxing style transform into more of a mixed style as he incorporates kicks and ground work into his arsenal. A really well done statement on modern martial arts with some excellent action.

## Who is in this film?

- Scott Adkins as Boyka
- Michael Jai White as George Chambers.



# The Protector

2005, Thailand

Tony Jaa is back with his second film, riding on the success of Ong Bak. The goal is to up the ante and create a film with more sophisticated fighters and action. This is a goal kicked and scored perfectly by the filmmakers.

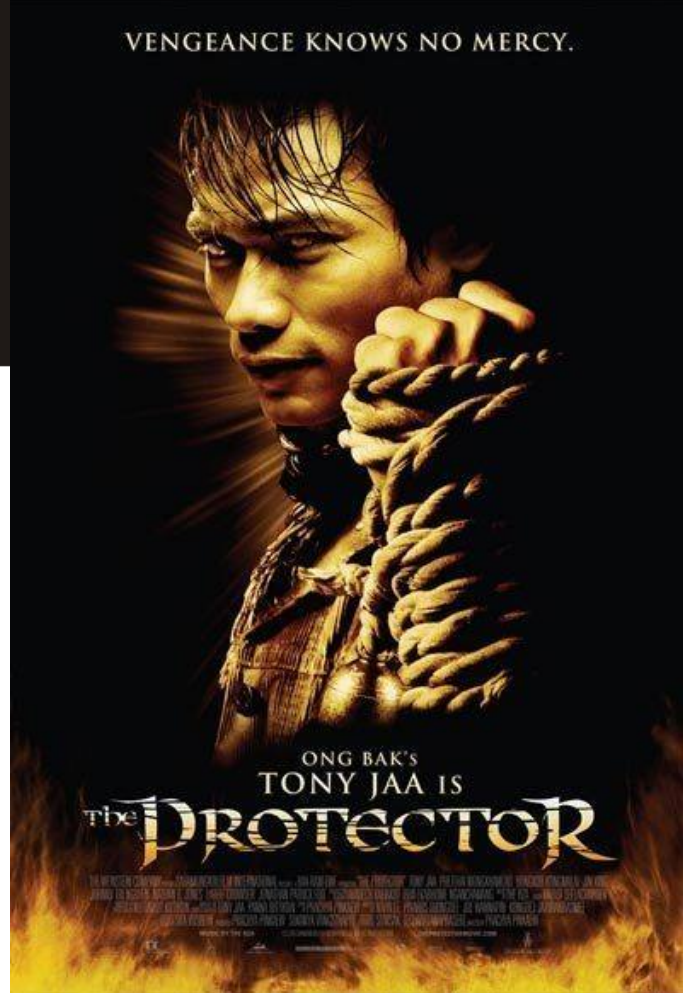
The premise isn't much different. Like Ong Bak something is stolen from Tony Jaa's character, only it's an Elephant instead of the head of Ong Bak. The villager must travel this time not to the big city, but all the way to Sydney in Australia to retrieve his Elephant. Of course he meets a lot of resistance and gets into a LOT of fights.

This film has impressive fight scenes and far superior actors playing his opponents.

## Just take a look at who is in this film:

- Tony Jaa as Kham
- Nathan Jones as TK
- Johnny Nguyen as Johnny
- Lateef Crowder as 'the Capoeira Fighter'
- Jon Foo as 'the Wushu Fighter'

*Now not all of these guys were necessarily famous before this film, but this movie did launch them into more attention grabbing parts as they were already extremely talented martial artists. Check this out and you won't be disappointed!*



# Flash Point

2007, Hong Kong

Donnie Yen keeps the ball rolling after the success of SPL: Killzone by releasing Flash Point.

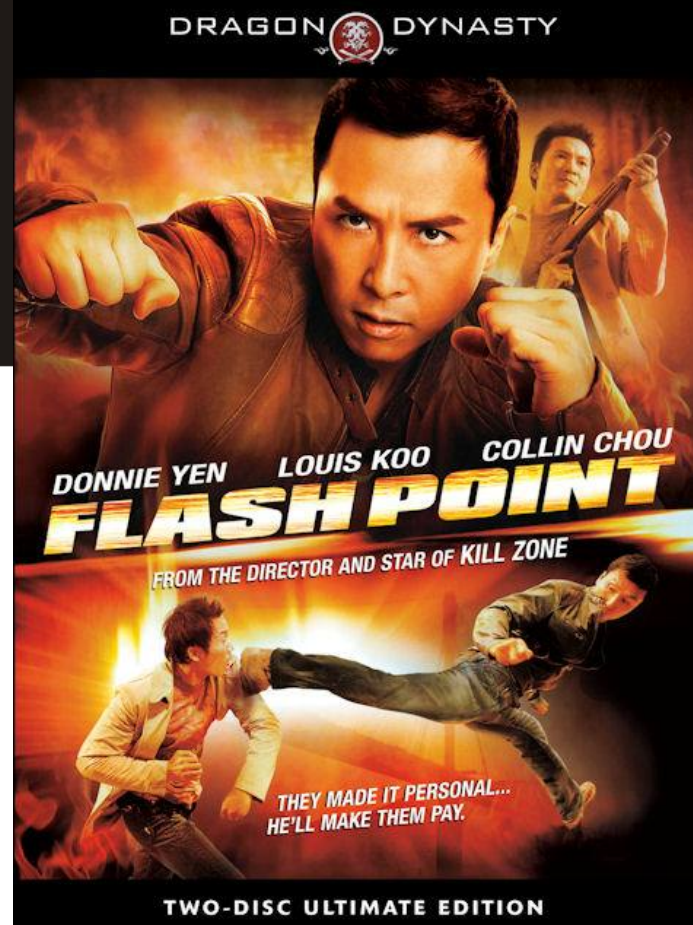
Flash Point is another Cops vs Bad Guys action film which Yen used as a vehicle to showcase and introduce Mixed Martial Arts to Hong Kong audiences.

It starts out with one police officer named Wilson, undercover in a Vietnamese gang. His status is discovered and his life ends up in danger, that's when he must work with Inspector Ma, played by Donnie Yen, to protect himself and his pregnant girlfriend.

This film has an awesome pace and ultimately builds up to a massive action packed finale at the end of the film. The finale includes a one on one fight using MMA techniques as Inspector Ma must fight against the Gang Leader Tony, played by Collin Chou.

## Who is in this film?

- Donnie Yen as Inspector Ma
- Xing Yu as Tiger
- Collin Chou as Tony



# Undisputed 3: Redemption

*2010, United States*

Undisputed 2 was a success, but people wanted to see more of the villain – the Russian Fighter Boyka!

So Boyka is back and fighting in an international tournament for his freedom. But the tournament is rigged, with the favorite fighter getting the cushy life and focused training while the other fighters are stuck performing hard labor in the sun, exhausting themselves beyond the point of training.

That's when Boyka teams up with the American named 'Turbo' to train and defeat Dolor, the Colombian Fighter and local champion.

This film shows Boyka reforming, seeing the error of his ways and doing his best to free himself from his situation. But what we love about this film is the step up in fight quality as Isaac Florentine brings in a number of talented martial artists to keep the action top notch and absolutely exciting.

**If you enjoyed Undisputed 2, you'll love this sequel! It stars:**

- Scott Adkins as Boyka
- Mark Zaror as Dolor
- Lateef Crowder as Santiago Silva



# Ninja 2: Shadow of a Tear

2013, United States



Whilst the fan base of 'Martial Arts Action Movies' voted Undisputed 3 the king of Scott Adkins films, I personally believe this film to be superior.

Ninja 2 follows the original Ninja film (also worth a watch) starring Scott Adkins as Casey, going across the world to track down the ninja who killed his pregnant wife...

**..to brutally kill him in sweet, sweet vengeance of course!**

We see Casey go on an absolute rampage, fighting and destroying any one who is in his path (all bad guys of course) and bringing a whole new level of action and intensity to his onscreen fights. This film has more fights than any other Adkins film and they are all jaw droppingly awesome. Must watch!

## **This film stars:**

- Scott Adkins as Casey Bowman
- Kane Kosugi as Nakabara
- Tim Man as Myat
- Kazu Patrick Tang as "Thug 2?"

# City of Violence

*2006, South Korea*

South Korea offers it's own taste of intense violence and martial arts action.

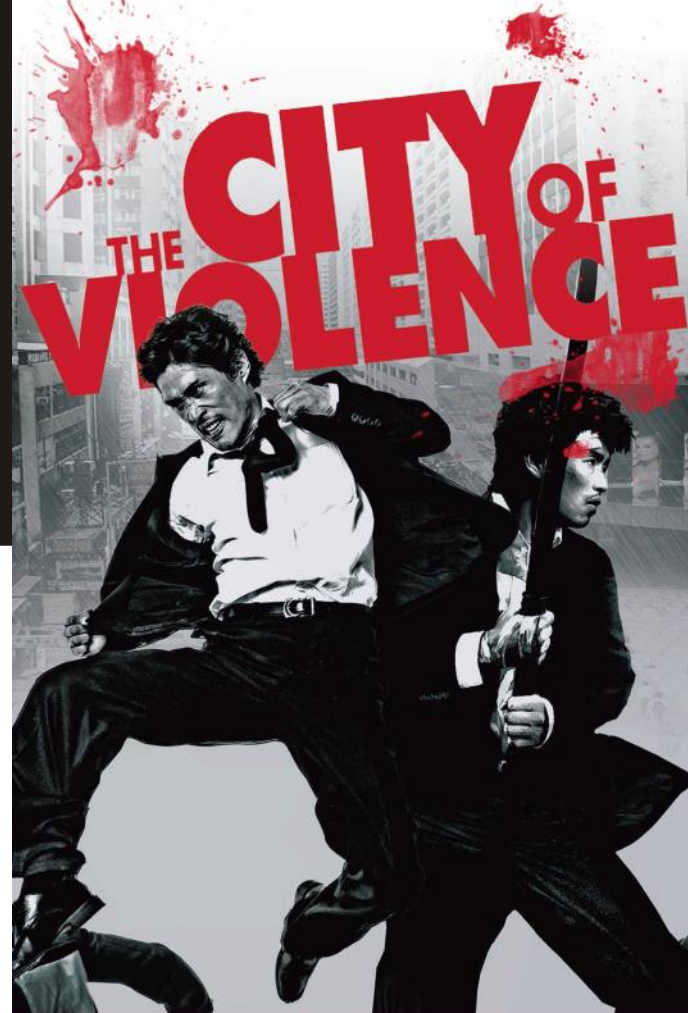
This film begins telling the story of a former gangster trying to clean up his act, Wangjae. Wangjae was always the toughest kid on the block, and a clever man on the streets but is now working at a local bar. He is lured into a fight one night and is stabbed to death.

His friends and brothers learn of the news and at his funeral with all the talk and share old times about Wangjae. His best friend, Taesoo (Doo-hong Jung), is a detective from out of town and he decides he's going to take time off and track down who killed Wangjae in order to bring them to justice.

As things unfold we learn that one of Wangjae's friends, Pilho, is an increasingly powerful mobster and is slowly taking over and ruining the streets. Eventually we learn that he is the man behind Wangjae's murder.

So in true action movie style Taesoo and Pilho's brother Seok-hwan decide to go after Wangjae and get revenge for the death of their friend and brother.

This film tells a story of revenge and some old friends turned enemies but what's really terrific is the finale – a bloody showdown as our heroes march into enemy territory to fight their way to revenge. Excellent action and extremely well done.





# Fearless

2006, Hong kong

Jet Li tells the story Huo Yuanjia, the real life master of the fictional character of Chen Zhen (Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury*).

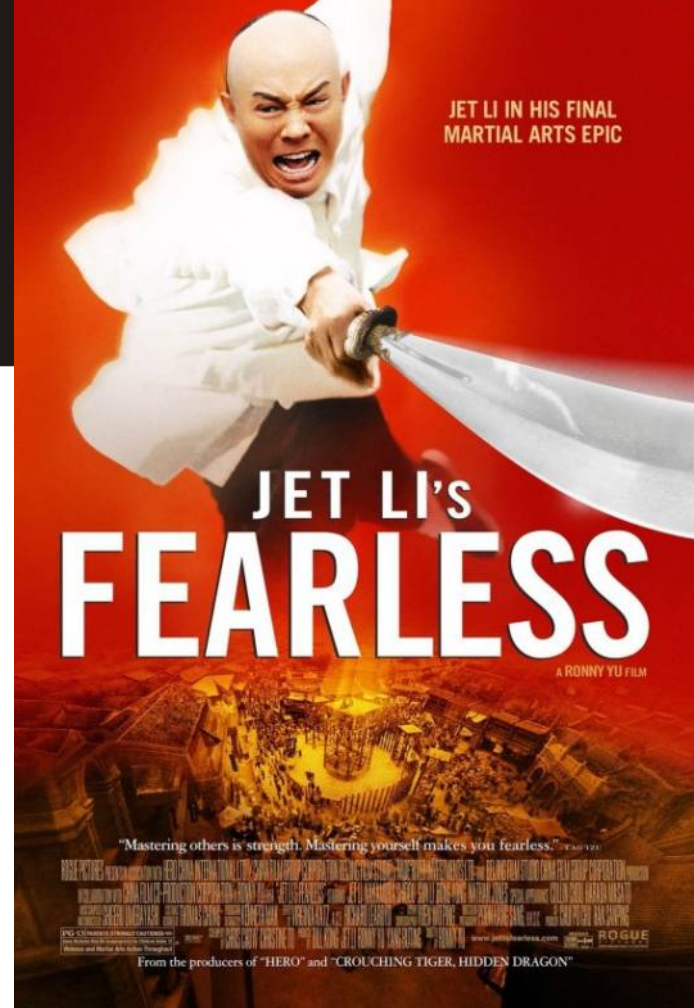
We are told about the younger days of Huo Yuanjia and eventually his adult years as a wushu champion, fighting martial artists from all around to prove he is the best. But it all goes downhill when he kills an opponent in a fight and completely loses his way, leaving town and drifting into a small village.

Huo starts to transform, becoming a person more concerned with moral character and peace than violence. Before long he must return to his home and make his message known.

This film is an excellent story and isn't like many of the other films in this E-Guide, it's more of a drama and more thought provoking yet still carries a high level of action that would satisfy any martial arts movie fan.

## Definitely check out this classic, it stars:

- Jet Li as Huo Yuanjia
- Collin Chou as Yuanjia's father
- Nathan Jones as Hercules O'Brien



# Blood and Bone

2009, United States

Isaac Florentine brought back Michael Jai White for his own Martial Arts film to show off his skills.

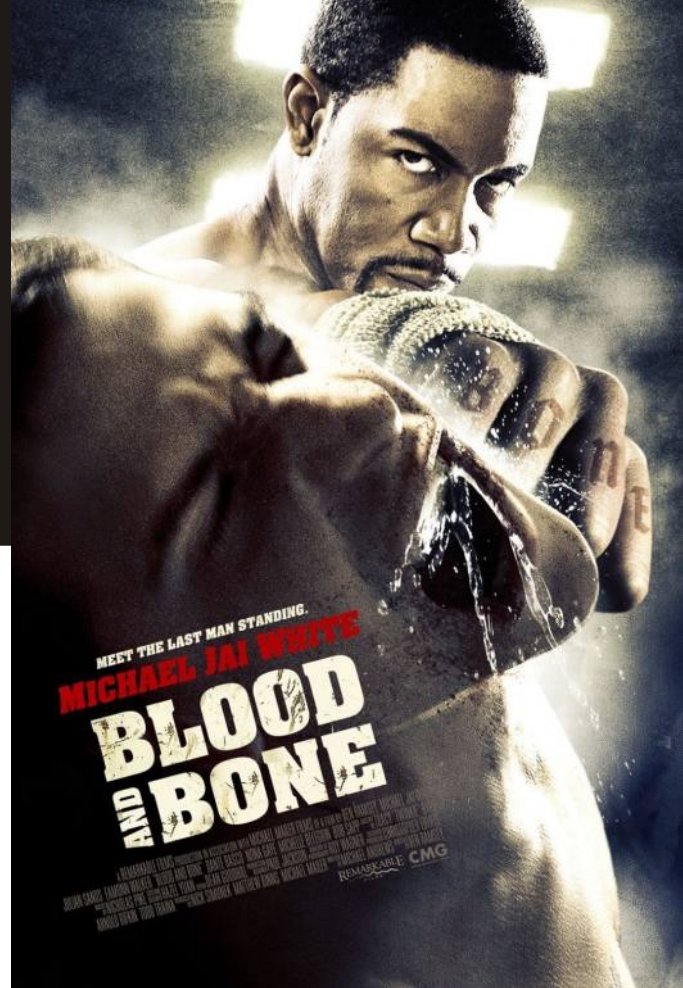
Bone (played by Michael Jai White) has been released from prison and heads out to fulfil a promise a deceased friend – to find his friend’s wife and child to free them from the control of a local crime boss named James.

He enters the local underground fight circuit, which James is heavily involved in and works his way through until he can get the information he needs from James. Naturally things get complicated and Bone has to go around kickin’ all sorts of ass to accomplish his goal.

**With Michael Jai White as the lead, the ass kickin’ is done extremely well.**

## **This movie stars:**

- Michael Jai White as Bone
- Bob Sapp as Hammerman
- Kimbo Slice as JC
- Maurice Smith as Fast Hands
- Matt Mullins as “The Pretty Boy”
- Gina Carano as Veretta
- Cameos from Bob Wall and Gene Lebell



# Fatal Contact

2006, Hong Kong

After Wu Jing caught a lot of attention in Donnie Yen's *SPL: Killzone*, he got the lead role in his own Martial Arts film called *Fatal Contact*.

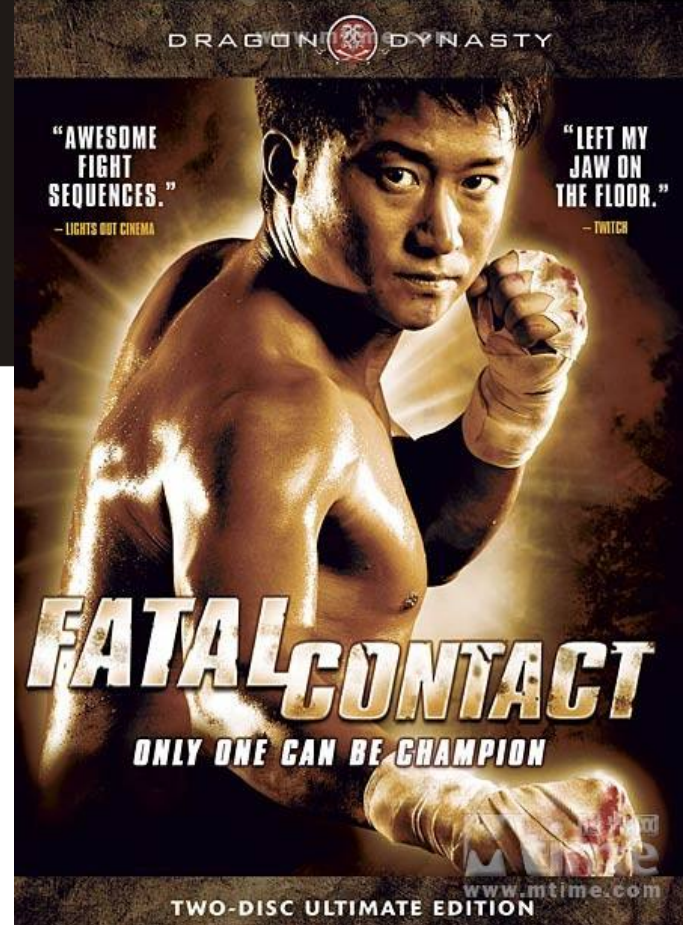
*Fatal Contact* tells the story of Kong, played by Wu Jing, who is a performer in a martial arts team who has a goal to become famous and be the next Jet Li.

But when he is convinced to join the underground fighting circuit, he gets caught up with a young girl and aggressively climbs the ladder to make more money. But he finds himself turning into a blood thirsty animal and starts to question what he's becoming.

This film has awesome action and truly shows off Wu Jing's abilities. This film does have some wire work but it is done tastefully and the film relies more on Wu Jing's abilities. Combined with speed and intensity, this film delivers to martial arts movie fan.

## **This film stars:**

- Jacky Wu jing as Kong
- Andy On as 'Silver Dragon'
- Xing Yu as King



# Chocolate

2008, Thailand

Just as Thailand produced a winner with Ong Bak, bringing Tony Jaa to the world, another 'showreel' style film was produced for a female martial artist named Yanin Jeeja. The movie is called 'Chocolate'.

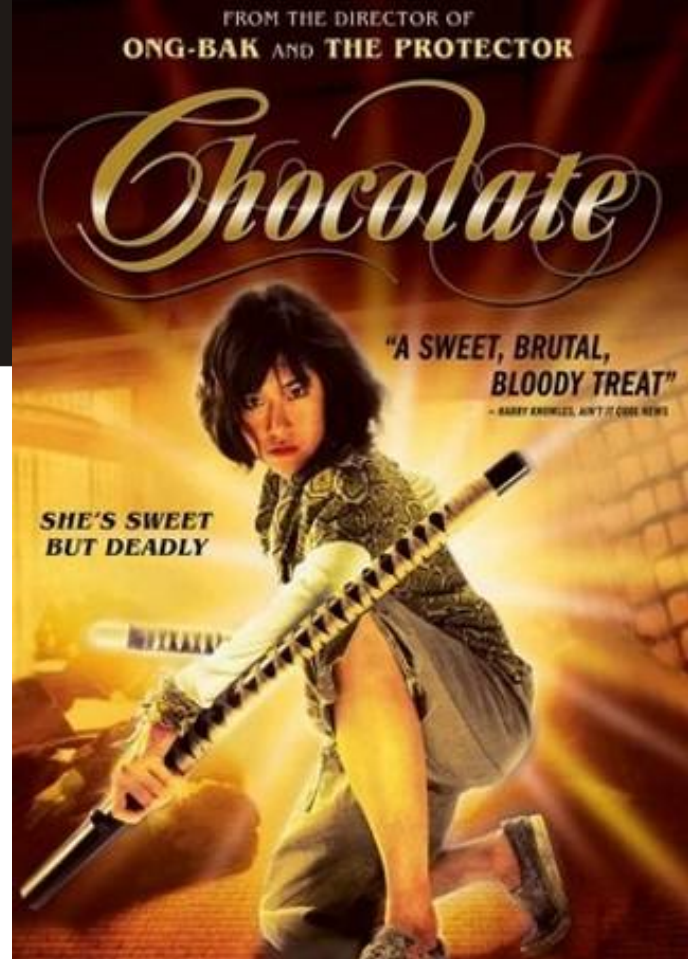
Yanin Jeeja's debut performance is an explosive introduction to her physical abilities. Chocolate however has pretty smart concept for a martial arts movie. Zen (Yanin Jeeja) is young woman who, through her disability, has gained an uncanny amount of environmental awareness and the ability to mimic what she sees.

After growing up watching martial arts movies and observing the Muay Thai club next to her home, Zen mimics these movements and becomes quite a capable fighter, and has superior reflexes due to her incredible environmental & spacial awareness.

Her mother, Zin, a former member of a Thai organised crime group, is forced to keep distance from Zen's father Masashi, a Yakuza boss who, after a turf war, has been told never to go near Zin again by the Thai criminal group. When Zin catches Cancer, Zen and her cousin Moom don't know what to do to be able to afford Zin's Chemotherapy treatments. They then stumble on a book of people who owe Zin money. Zen then goes out and demands money from these people, usually ending up fighting off her attackers with her superior skill in martial arts.

**This film offers some tremendous acrobatic moves and awesome fighting intensity that has the Thailand sense of action all over it.**

It doesn't quite sit next to Ong Bak or the Protector, but it is pretty up there and is a film any fan of these movies should watch.



# Fighter in the Wind

2004, South Korea

Another killer film from South Korea, *Fighter in the Wind* tells the story of Mas Oyama, the founder of Kyukoshin Karate – an exceptionally hard style of martial arts.

We follow Oyama, played by Dong-kun Yang, as he makes the move to Japan and the troubles he faced that lead him to travel into the woods to train for several months, developing his style and hardening his body.

He returns and challenges martial artists around the country to challenge matches to prove himself and his style – earning the attention of a very powerful enemy – Kato.

This film has some hard hitting action and a different style than most on this list. Oyama is a product of hardship and a toughened warrior who steps into these well established schools and really shows them what he's made of. The story unfolds interestingly and we get some insight into Oyama and his 'code'.

Overall a terrific story combined with some excellent action. An absolute classic.



# Ip Man 2

2010, Hong Kong

Ip Man is without a doubt one of the best martial arts films in the genre, so you'd naturally expect some quality from it's sequel!

Master Ip (still Donnie Yen) is living in Hong Kong and starts up a Wing Chun school. But there's a local group that govern the Kung Fu schools in operation and Master Ip must fight for his right to teach.

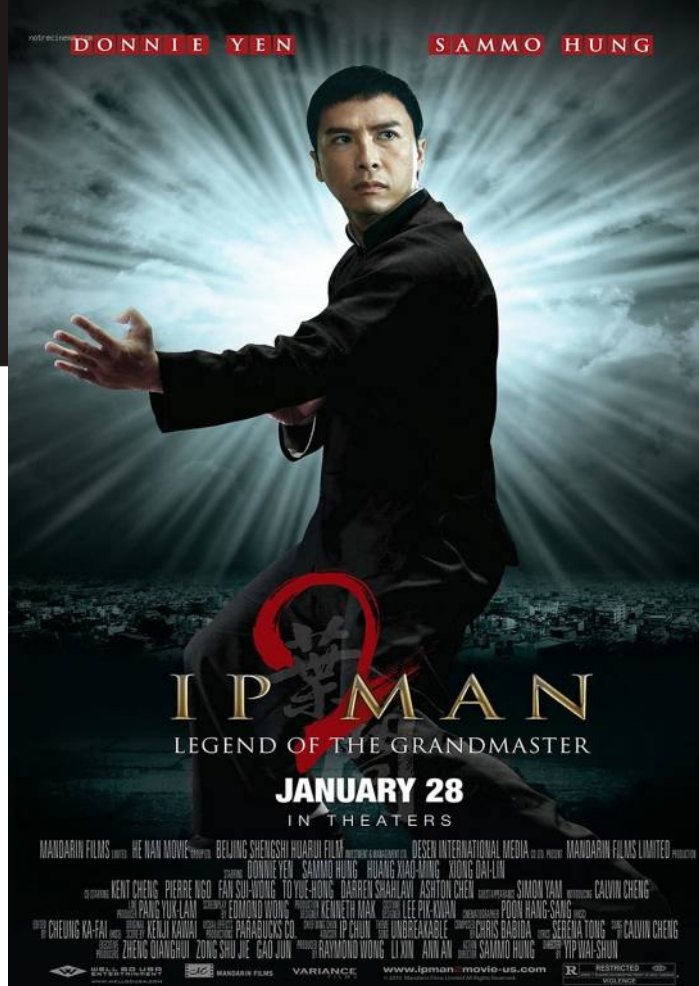
On top of that a British boxer is in town and kills some local kung fu fighters in a 'friendly' match. Naturally Ip steps up for Chinese pride to defeat this British boxer named 'Twister'.

What's cool about this film is the step up from the first Ip Man. Master Ip doesn't just yawn and slap down his enemies as he would a fly – he gets challenged. The fights Ip Man faces are from fighters more his level and this brings a new tension to the film as we see his vulnerable side.

As per the first film the choreography is first class and Wing Chun has never looked so good on film. If you enjoyed the first, check this one out!

## Ip Man 2 stars:

- Tony Jaa as Ip Man
- Louis Fan as Jin San Zhao (the reformed thug)
- Sammo Hung as Master Hung Chun-Nam
- Darren Shahlavi as Twister



# Falcon Rising

2014, United States

This is Michael Jai White doing what he does best – kickin' ass.

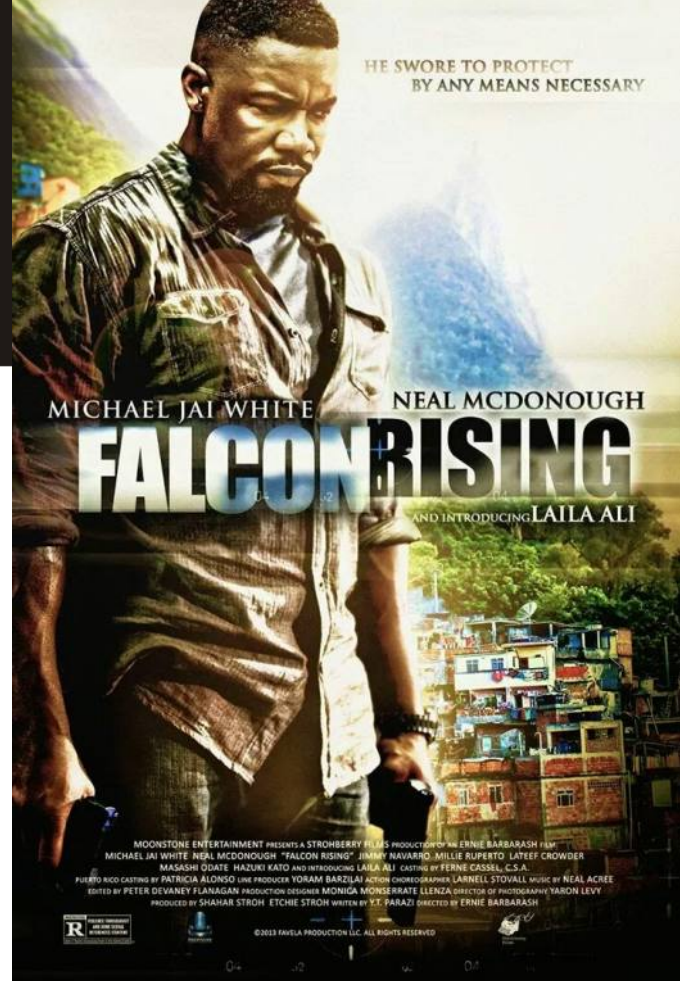
Michael Jai White plays Falcon, a man who enters the Favelas in Brazil to find who nearly killed his sister and bring them to justice.

I forgot to mention – Falcon is kind of elite ex-military guy who can basically walk into any room and tear apart 20 men with his bare hands. It's a true martial arts "superhero" movie and Michael Jai White does a fantastic job showing off his skills.

But as with most martial arts and action films – the finale is what makes it and where we see the best action.

## This film stars:

- Michael Jai White as Falcon
- Lateef Crowder as Carlo Bororo
- Masashi Odate as Hirimoto



# BONUS: Honorable Mentions

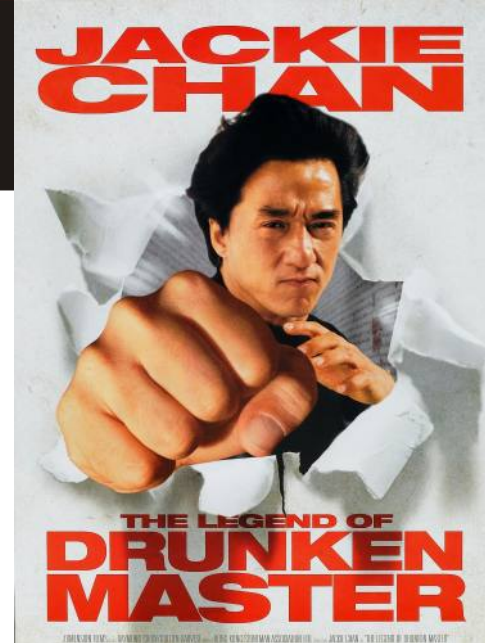
Ok, so these movies are from 21 years ago at the time of writing (2015)! I originally included these but realized they were too old. So here's another 2 movies to keep you entertained from 1994...

## Legend of Drunken Master

Jackie Chan's most celebrated Kung Fu film is Legend of Drunken Master.

Jackie is back as Wong Fei Hung and facing all kinds of trouble whilst giving us some laughs at the same time. I mean he gets drunk and fights bad guys, what's not to laugh at about that?

This film showcases some of the best action Jackie has ever done and is an absolute must see for martial arts fans and Jackie Chan fans!



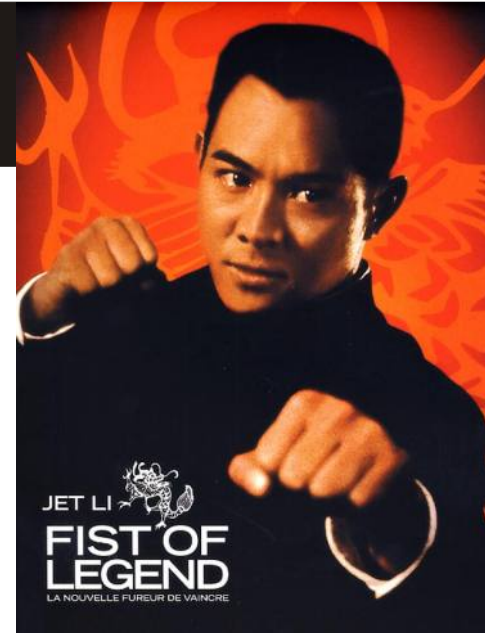
## Fist of Legend

Fist of Legend is a remake of Bruce Lee's Fist of Fury, only with Jet Li playing Chen Zhen.

Chen's teacher, Huo Yuanjia (same guy in Fearless, also played by Jet Li) is murdered and Chen heads back to Shanghai from Japan to investigate. He find himself faced against some powerful Japanese men involved in the military and finds himself confused as to how they could have defeated his master, being completely unimpressed with their fight skills.

Of course he gets the attention of the Japanese and ends up fighting against them in pure Kung Fu movie fashion.

This film has some pf Jet Li's absolute best work, another must see for the martial arts fan!







# THANKS FOR READING!

I hope this free little booklet has given you some ideas on movies you'd like to check out. If you feel there's any movies missing or would simply like me to talk about on the website, please email me!

You can catch me at: [wade@martialartsactionmovies.com](mailto:wade@martialartsactionmovies.com)

**Thanks for reading, and thank you for subscribing!**



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