



Episode 425 – 36 Chambers of Shaolin Discussion with Mr. Jason Blum |
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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, everybody! Welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 425. Today, I'm joined by Mr. Joshua Blum and we're talking about the movie, The 36th Chamber of Shaolin. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, your host on this show, founder of whistlekick, lover of martial arts and professional martial arts doer of stuff. Why is that title so vague? Because there's a lot that I'm doing. Of course, assisted by a wonderful team. We have whistlekick.com with a bunch of products, almost all of which I designed personally so you should check those out and if you do, use the code PODCAST15, gets you 15% off everything in the store and you can see links to all the other projects that we do. Martial arts radio is just one of the projects that we're working on so please, check it out, show some love, maybe share an episode or two. Today's episode is a bit different from what we typically do but it's a good one. Mr. Joshua Blum, host of The 13th Hour podcast, reached out and said hey, would you like to collaborate and do a movie review sort of episode with me. I said yeah, let's do it so we talked about movies, we ended up with 36th Chamber of Shaolin which is of course, a classic martial arts film that well, we'll talk about it so this conversation is virtually spoiler-free. We don't dig into any of the major things. In fact, I can imagine that listening to this conversation would at all ruin the experience of watching this movie for the first time but it's also not so shallow to the movie that if you've seen it, you won't get more out of it so whether or not you've seen the movie, you're going to get something out of this episode and my hope is that if you haven't



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seen it, afterwards maybe you'll go check it out because I'm glad that I did. Anyway, that's enough talking. That's a long enough intro, let's start talking about the movie.

Joshua Blum:

Welcome to the show, my name is Joshua Blum. I'm the host of The 13th Hour podcast and I'm here with Jeremy Lesniak, the host of whistlekick.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, what's going on? This is going to be fun!

Joshua Blum:

This is, I believe, my first time ever doing a joint episode with another podcaster.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm honored. Episodes that we do with other podcasters tend to go better because they know what to expect. I don't have to walk people through things. They're confident on the microphone and we can, it's kind of the difference between sparring with someone who's spent a bunch of time sparring and then sparring with someone who's never sparred but they've trained for a while. They know the movements but they get in there but they're not quite sure how to connect those dots as you're working with them.

Joshua Blum:

What a good segue because today, we're going to actually be talking about a Kung Fu film, 36th Chamber of Shaolin and I believe it's the very first Kung Fu movie I've ever seen and there's plenty of training and sparring sequences within the film.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There certainly are, yeah. Talk about a classic movie and the irony, I'm going to get this out of the way upfront. I'm going to let everyone know this is my first time watching this movie and it's not that I'm opposed to older movies, it's not that I'm opposed to martial arts content of any kind, it's that most of them, I don't enjoy. I find most of them to be, I'll be honest, kind of lame and maybe that destroys my credibility as a martial artist and martial arts podcaster but it's the truth, man.

Joshua Blum:

I hear you. I mean, if I had to pick a list of favorite films, it would be tough actually if they were like Desert Island films assuming you had some way of playing a film on a desert island but that being said, compared to the ones that I know I would definitely want to have with me, a lot of the martial arts ones



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are they're kind of the same story over and over again and once you've seen one, it's kind of like you've seen a lot of them and some of the acting and the stories' so painful. It's kind of hard to recommend though I have to say, with this particular one, for whatever reason, if I had to pick a film to recommend to somebody who doesn't know anything about Kung Fu films or martial arts films or even action films, I might, I think I would feel confident picking this one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have to agree. There was something in this. I went in really nervous when we started talking, we kicked around some movie ideas and there was just something about this one. It felt like the appropriate choice because it's a classic. Many people have watched it, pretty much everyone's heard of it if they haven't watched it and I had a little bit of guilt that I hadn't seen it. I thought okay, here's an opportunity for me to take a couple hours in the middle of the day, sit down and watch a movie and call it work.

Joshua Blum:

You know, Jeremy, I will own that I may have set the down a little bit weird because I originally approached you by re-watching Blood Sport which, if you know, is a great film but you kind of have to be in a certain mood to do that one as I was going through it. I was like oh God, there are certain parts of it that I was kind of really cringing because JCVD, the great thespian that he is, there's some parts of it that a certain place and time, it was fine and the fighting sequences and everything like that there is but there's this whole stretches of the film that are not quite that and those are the parts that I always skipped over as a kid so I'm glad we settled on this one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Me too, me too but I'll admit that the first 30 minutes or so, I was regretting our choice in there and thinking what have I gotten myself into? I'm watching it and of course, what's the first thing I do because I'm watching it on Netflix, I press pause and see how much I have left. Oh, this isn't a 90-minute movie. This is a 2-hour movie. I have another 90 minutes of this. What am I going to talk about other than this movie is terrible and I hate it and I initially went down these very dark tangents in my mind of how could I come on to a podcast? How can I talk about this classic film that everybody loves and I hated and not feel like a fraud and then it changed.

Joshua Blum:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It was almost like a light switch.

Joshua Blum:



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I guess for context, if you haven't seen this film, it goes by a couple different names. Maybe I'll give just a brief synopsis. I'll try not to throw, there probably will be spoilers in here but so, 36th Chamber of Shaolin, the star is Gordon Liu and I think in the U.S. it might have been renamed Master Killer or some weird title like that which is ironic because I don't think the main character kills anybody. It's 1978 and it's one of the Shaw Brothers' films and fairly typical plot. This is like sort of the somewhere in the Qing Dynasty in China. The student in his town, he and a number of other people are oppressed by the Manchus so his family is killed by them and he manages to escape to the Shaolin temple where he learns martial arts in over a course of 5 years, becomes a master and goes and returns back to his home but in the temple itself, there are these 35 Kung Fu chambers where different martial arts skills were taught and he goes through those so his goal is to actually create a 36th chamber which is like a way to teach Kung Fu to the common man so just the brief synopsis of that but the first, I don't know, we'll just say, Jeremy, the first hour, at least, it's kind of slow. It's all training basically.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah. It was the first, it was like the first 15 or 20 minutes that kind of set up the plot. You've got to establish who the good guys are and who the bad guys are and why there's conflict. They certainly take their time with that and as one would expect from this genre, the acting is not great. The dialogue probably was better originally but of course, it's dubbed so we're getting a little bit less elegance and nuance, I'm sure, there and you talk about Kung Fu flick without martial arts which really, the first 30 minutes, there are people dying and fighting but I wouldn't call it martial arts. You're kind of biding your time.

Joshua Blum:

It may have been a stylistic thing of that time too. I feel like maybe early 80s had that sort of they were slower in pace and this one definitely has a bit of a slow burn to the first half of it and it picks up pretty quickly after that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely.

Joshua Blum:

But yeah, it's weird because this particular movie, I think I actually saw in Mandarin with my mom. I must have been like 6 or 7 or something like that and every now and then, I lived sort of the New York area and if a wind blew in a certain direction, we get a Chinese language TV station and I think this was the movie that came on one day and so, we sat down and watched it and the only thing I really remember from the movie is the part where the main character is training and he's trying to jump over these logs in the water and he repeatedly fails and he ends up splashing into the water and everything



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like that and so that's the part I remember among everything else. What is that movie? I didn't actually know what it was but I forget how I actually found that out that it was this one. That was sort of my first experience with the film and I'm interested actually to kind of re-watch the movie in its original language because I noticed that the dubbing, the English dub and the English subtitles don't actually match. They're actually quite different in some parts so I'm kind of curious and I think the original language was Mandarin that it was done in so I'm kind of curious to see if it matches up a bit better because there's some Pinyin...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you speak Mandarin?

Joshua Blum:

I do speak some. I wouldn't say I'm fluent but enough I think to kind of get a sense, sometimes when you're watching the movie in the original language and then you read the subtitles, you're like no, that's not at all what they say.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I mean, the type of translation that now you would assume was computer-generated, of course, it wasn't computer-generated back then but still someone who knew one of the languages and barely knew the other and just kind of put it out there and made sure that it fit the story arc and that was about it.

Joshua Blum:

Right. There isn't a lot of crucial dialogue, I would say. You would still kind of get the gist of the film and that's probably what I did when I was a kid just watching it but there's a couple plot points there or whatever that, as an adult, I kind of wonder about and kind of curious to do that set up but yeah, it's kind of funny when I was a kid, I mean, there was no YouTube, no internet or anything like that. When I first started training in martial arts, this sounds really funny to say but if a martial arts film came on TV like a Chuck Norris film or something like that, I would actually sit down with a notepad and actually take notes on things because I figured like well, if it works for Chuck Norris, it might work for me and so, I remember doing that with some of these Kung Fu films. They would be playing, this is probably when I was a teenager, but on Sunday mornings or afternoons, I watch a whole bunch of them. Usually miss the beginning and end but the, I don't even know the names of most of them or the actors involved or anything like that but for a while, I was just starting, I would actually sit down and take notes and then go and try these things out like sparring sessions and stuff like that. It obviously didn't take long for me to see that the fighting was very stylized or anything like that but every now and then, you pick up a thing or two and you're like okay, maybe I'll give that a try.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the things that I liked, you alluded to the progression, the training sequence. One of the things when the rest of the world was complaining about Iron Fist, the thing that I really loved about Iron Fist was I felt it was the most authentic portrayal of a student-teacher dynamic that I've ever seen in anything approaching martial arts. The dynamic between Danny and Colleen as his sensei and then, in the 2nd season, the complications around that but here with 36th Chamber, we have not so much the student-teacher dynamic. We get a little bit of that but the training progression, the idea that these chambers are not necessarily linear progression, there're some opportunity for individualization there but the idea that training is segmented is something that I, actually, am starting to see more of a return to that now as martial arts schools have more diversity of what they're teaching and I found that really interesting.

Joshua Blum:

Right, I mean, you know, Jeremy, like you taught martial arts. I liked that they show that because it kind of shows that one, this is not an instantaneous thing. It's somewhat realistic in that it shows that it takes him 5 years which I think is a reasonable time to train some level of competence, maybe not certainly mastery, and then, if you're going to learn a new skill, you got to need to break it down into these isolated little segments so for people who haven't seen the film or just heard of it in a review, there's each of these little chambers or rooms has a theme to it so there's one that's basically on footwork where he's basically jumping over the water, light footwork and there's another one where he's like, there's this one where he has to use his head. I think it's called the head chamber where he's using his head to pound against the sandbags.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Which, let's spend a moment on that one, because that was the campiest part of the entire, I just found it so ridiculous. It's not giving away a plot point so I'll let, for anyone who hasn't seen it or as you said haven't seen it in a while, imagine a bunch of heavy bags set up in kind of a gauntlet style that you have to run through but you're expected to run through and knock them out of the way with your skull so he's headbutting these heavy bags out of the way and he's the only one that's making it through. everybody else is hitting 2 of them and falling to the floor, assuming with some minor concussion and he makes the goofiest faces and the most ridiculous noises as he's doing this and why this hasn't become a meme? I don't know.

Joshua Blum:

Oh, that's a great idea!

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It's like the perfect anecdote for posting anything political on social media or really, addressing any current divisive subject matter in the moment is just banging your head against all these heavy bags just seem to be a better visual than banging your head against the wall.

Joshua Blum:

Or I think, I don't know if you saw the abbot who is the instructor for that particular chamber, did you see his head? Like how many scars?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah, it was disgusting! I mean, I look at that and think I don't want to be in this chamber.

Joshua Blum:

Right, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't want my head to look like that. You're gross. Put on a hat.

Joshua Blum:

And is it really worth it? Is it really worth whatever brain damage that probably ensued to get through that but yeah, okay, granted. So, there were these different chambers, that was one of them, literally beating your head against the wall kind of chamber. There was a few others. There was the first couple, I think, were purely conditioning. There was one where he has to hold two buckets and then, attached to his arms are knives and so, he has to hold them out perpendicular to his body to build shoulder strength. If he lowers his arm a little, he'll stab himself with a knife so these variants of torture, basically, that he has to work himself through so I don't know if the real Shaolin temple.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't think so because I don't think anyone would have survived that and then, the other piece that I was watching as I was watching that was all he has to do is rotate his arms a little bit and then the knives wouldn't stab him.

Joshua Blum:

Yeah, there was...

Jeremy Lesniak:

There were some holes to that one.



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Joshua Blum:

Yeah, definitely some plot to these things. I do remember, do you remember, this is a slight deviation but the original Kung Fu series with David Carradine?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Not well.

Joshua Blum:

I thought it was the Shaolin Temple where he originally got his training but I think this was a thing where one of the parts where you have to go through, you had to grab this hot urn with your forearms and it would basically scar the inside of your forearms but it would leave like a lasting mark, essentially like a tattoo and so, it was a very kind of similar training thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That doesn't sound worth the pain.

Joshua Blum:

Yeah, the sequence in the beginning of the original Kung Fu, they have to walk across the rice paper and he has to snatch the pebble from the master's hand, I could kind of see that kind of thing fitting in to a movie like this or vice versa.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. I don't know why we feel the need to tell the rest of the world that the heart of our training is so difficult that people bully and are scarred and die. There's no pride in that for me.

Joshua Blum:

I think and I don't know if this gets to some of the, this is a Kung Fu film, literally if you look at what those words mean, Kung Fu is like hard work so the training montage where he is working hard and basically, suffering his way through, essentially a couple years before he actually even learn some punching or kicking or throws or anything like that, you're basically toiling away. It's this very kind of traditional kind of old school way of approaching it so it's kind of an interesting thing. I don't think too many films kind of focus on that. Although, you saw pieces of it in films like the first Karate Kid with all the yard work, the painting or anything like that before there was any actual quote-unquote formal training, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah, I think there's something to be said for that. I think there's something to, and whether or not this was the reason but to me, that read as testing him. He comes in and is this appropriate for him to be here and there's some descension early on about that fact and he remains a polarizing figure through the movie but that test, can we break him? Can we convince him that you don't, this is not the place for him.

Joshua Blum:

I kind of also saw it as because there are tons of other, he's not the only one going through this but there's tons of other people in training with him, other novices I guess, so this is the task of the monks. This is their training, this is the way that they achieve some hope of achieving enlightenment is going through some kind of hard physical training. If it weren't Kung Fu, it'd be something else but something that allows them to, like in the film, they call it the Top Chamber which is basically, mental. It's talking about these philosophical aspects of life but without that hard work of knowing what suffering is and so forth. Let's not forget that this is a Buddhist temple and they might not be able to achieve that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, and I think the next piece to talk about was the moment and there's, because we're kind of moving chronologically, if there's stuff you want to talk about before this, by all means, but the part where the main character's advocating for teaching people outside of the temple. People who are not committed to this lifestyle as their full-time pursuit and how might that change the world and that, to me, I don't know what, I don't want to say that it was abrupt that it came out of left field but it was shocking enough to me, because up until that moment, we're seeing this guy's training and I don't remember his name, what's the main character's name?

Joshua Blum:

Oh, San Te. His original name was change to the one that was given in the temple which was San Te.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, so here he is, he's training, he's got his why. He's got a pretty powerful why and we won't go there because it ruins the story as you might imagine, it's because somebody killed somebody because that's the plot in every Kung Fu movie of this era but all of a sudden, he has this kind of clarity and he's willing to speak up and say, what if other people can learn Kung Fu and they're just so dismissive of that and I found that fascinating because, while it does affect the plot, it almost represented to me a shift. That was a hard shift. That wasn't just a little bit of a detour but the movie completely changed the way I saw it at that moment.

Joshua Blum:



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Yeah, so I was interested in that too and that's my second time around watching this, or I don't know maybe it's my 3rd or 4th but the 2nd time I really remember, I thought about that really differently like I did the last time I re-watched this which was probably 10 or 15 years ago, and I thought his motivation coming in was fairly typical, typical person who says like okay, I want to learn to fight, I want to learn martial arts for whatever reason. He must learn how to protect himself, right? So, he goes to the training, he learns it, he has memories of other people couldn't defend themselves but he's like they should also have that opportunity as well and when he presents that, the head abbot was like outraged but the guy who was kind of like a rival with him, the guy he ends up fighting a couple times in those duels, he's told to punish our main character and the 2nd time around watching it, I thought the way the punishment happens was kind of like a punishment but wink-wink-nod kind of thing where the guy says that the punishment is you have to leave the temple but it kind of has, at least I thought, he got a look on his face that says kind of you are going to leave the temple but in parenthesis go and do what you need to do kind of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I saw it that way too.

Joshua Blum:

It was like we can't officially condone you doing this but we kind of think it's a good idea and the way I kind of saw his face is like, you know, I may disagree with you but we're going to agree to disagree and I respect you for that and I don't know...it's kind of the first time I saw it, at least.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I saw a little bit differently. I saw in the head abbot, absolutely didn't want anything to change which I think, there's an archetype there. the old person is unwilling to bend and this is what we always done kind of a thing and even though, the guy he fought was kicking his butt and even though, he was disciplining him and ultimately, throw him out, my takeaway was he saw the value in that but he's unwilling to risk his place in the temple, his standing in the organization to defend this novel idea but saw oh, here's a chance for you to go kind of test it without any risk to himself.

Joshua Blum:

Yeah, I think we kind of thought the same way and with something like that, would that have gone the way the movie went had this been reality, I don't know. By that point in the movie, I think that's the hour or maybe more because the last 35 or 40 minutes of the movie is basically once San Te leaves the temple and basically, going back to his hometown and he's basically wreaking havoc on the people that tormented him and his family and his town and he has to test himself a couple different times because he has to gain some followers and they, of course, test him. You see that he manages to use all the same



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old skills that he learned at the temple sort of like which is, I have to say I liked, because it was kind of a part where in one of the earlier chambers, he had to stand still and just use his eyes back and forth, otherwise, if he turned his head, he would get burned by kind of like this burning incense things and they do a callback to that where he is darting his eyes back and forth and at this one sequence where he's being attacked by 2 people or something like that and there's another part where he has to headbutt something, a little callback to him at the head chamber and I think that's at least once so they do these little, I thought it was the example of the way the film making actually was trying to come full circle which, I have to say, I thought was pretty cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely, I think that anytime that you show a training sequence, you have to pull some elements from that to show the usefulness of it. Otherwise, it feels wasted and we see that in pretty much every movie whether it's martial arts or anything else. You see training from Rocky movies when he actually gets out there and gets his fight. You know there's going to be a punch or a combo that you absolutely saw in training 30 times and I think that that's something that we can all, maybe not relate to, but hopefully, identify with because we want our training to be applicable. We want to know that it's for something and so to watch, oh, okay, that plays out, that's useful with something. Everyone, not just martial artists, but everyone wants to know that the time we invest has value.

Joshua Blum:

Right and I guess, the part of it where he's testing those skills for real, this is a movie so obviously, the fighting is very stylized and everything like that so what I kind of like to see out of one of these films where they show the "real" sequences being less stylized and more kind of all over the place than it kind of are in films because this is probably more, in the temple, there was a certain, it was training. Things were controlled in a certain way. You don't necessarily had an influx of all the stress hormones and everything that screw everything up but regardless, he's very confident and handles himself very well and attracts a bunch of followers who want to learn Kung Fu from him and so, I thought that it's sort of comes full circle on that kind of journey of mastery. Where do you start in terms of really your own kind of motivation and you get better at things and okay, there's this desire to teach other people or give back in some way to the community so I thought that was kind of a nice cycle that they showed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, and I liked as he got out there, as he's attracting these followers, despite his skill, despite the time in the temple where it's very clear that he's become kind of head of his class or at the very least, one of the more skilled monks, the humility that he takes with him outside. He doesn't let anybody call him master and he's very humble. It's really the only word I can use but then, there are some parts where, as you might imagine again, it's a Kung Fu movie so there has to be some kind of final battle. As we start



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leading towards that, his openness to some of the skills, some of the non-martial arts skills that might be useful amongst these other people, watching the things that they do and going wow, maybe we can use this and that kind of ties back, for me, to the conversation to the people saying we should train people outside of the temple and I think he was seeing that people are coming in not with nothing. They aren't starting their martial arts with this complete empty vessel but they all have their own experiences that if we can leverage Kung Fu into that, how much more do we all gain?

Joshua Blum:

You remember the sequence where I think it was a blacksmith, towards the end of the film, he was being tormented by the Manchus and then, San Te just gives him a few tips like choke up on the handle a little bit so you're not weighed down by this, the blacksmith was using this sledgehammer to defend himself but it was just so heavy, he was just really slow. He was giving him some tips like adjust things a little bit so he was able to utilize the weapon a little bit better and that kind of was already, even though, it didn't seem like he had any formal training, at least not much, I mean, he was already pretty good at defending himself with just that so I think it was taking what people already kind of had, whatever resources they currently have and then, tweaking them a little bit to kind of suit them a little bit better and I could see that being very, almost, not the anti-thesis but a very different approach from the way he was taught where it's like we're going to break you down, assuming you have nothing and then build it up in this progression of skills that everybody since the dawn of, not time, but everybody else has done this this way so why should you be any different kind of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, there was a lot of that, I think, we as martial artists, can pull from those lessons as student, the lessons as teacher and it was right about there. It's a 2-hour movie, I was already very open. The first 30 minutes didn't really do a lot for me but I started to get into it and then, the last 30 or 40 minutes, once he leaves the temple, it was such a different film and admittedly, if we hadn't had all the stuff prior to that, it wouldn't have made sense or been nearly as compelling so I'm happy for that 30 minutes that I suffered through. Probably would even make a correlation to training and the movie we're talking about with that.

Joshua Blum:

It's kind of interesting because the, I'm sure you probably had these debates, either with your students or just in your own head about this where you see kind of training going is often when students come and they often want to learn the cool tricks and everything like that, get good as quickly as possible but you know it's going to be a long road and there is always this debate about do we kind of just you tell people that you know, you just need more time and practice and everything like that rather than kind of fostering that inherent creativity that they only have. What about this way or what about this way or



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what if this happens? You kind of want to, sometimes you may want to tell them, some of the students, to just kind of like just do the basic stuff first and so, there was definitely something inherently different about this particular character in that even despite that, despite all the basic training that went on for years, he maintained some of that creativity and his own kind of way of doing things. I don't know if this is actually historically accurate, probably not but there's when he was having difficulty at one point, he creates the 3-sectional stuff to help him out. Remember that instance?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think that was a really important moment.

Joshua Blum:

Kind of showing like okay, I can use the tools I have with me but I could leverage something that might be a little bit better and if I can learn how to use that so he creates this 3-sectional stuff which he uses throughout the rest of the film and there's another part where I thought it was also an interesting use of the environment where I think it's like a miller guy who grinds rice where he plops down on some rice bags and so the main character looks at that and sees all these rice flour and he's like wouldn't that be an interesting diversion to be able to use and they use that shortly in a future sequence for exactly that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I suspect you're right that the idea of the creativity, everything that we know of martial arts today when we talk about tradition, we're talking about doing it in a very specific way but I think there is something to be said for that creative element. The ability to find one's own space to make those movements or those sequences your own. I think that's important. I think it's important as instructors to make sure that students have space to carve out their own identity as a martial artist and I think it's important for the rest of the school, the class, because if everyone's doing the exact same thing, yes, there is a standardization there, there is a benefit there but everyone's a little bit different so to identify, hey, this person does this in a slightly different way and that works for them and also there's this 6 other people so everyone can benefit from that and admittedly, the school I trained in, a lot of different schools and if this is not your school, I'm not belittling it by any means, but as a general rule, the schools that I've trained at where people have some space for carving out their own identity as a martial artist, they tend to have better students than those who suppress that.

Joshua Blum:

I think a lot of this sort of battle between well, this has worked for hundreds, in some cases maybe thousands, of years so if you just trust the system then it will work for you and there's an argument to be made there. On the other hand, like you said, everybody is a little bit different. Everybody has a different body type. Different advantages or disadvantages in terms of reach or mobility, more so,



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sometimes you end up beating your head against the wall, literally, I guess, or figuratively, discovering that something's not going to work for you just based on your particular makeup for whatever reason so I don't know if...it's interesting for a film like this, I don't know if instructors were kind of open to that though he ends up coming up himself, I think.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, I think we start learning about him early on because of his why, because of the whole crux of the movie, the reason that he's come to train, he's not going to let anything stand in that way and he goes off and there's a tremendous amount of time training solo, working on these things that he couldn't get during the day and he goes and he spends, we don't know how long but the implication is that it's a great deal of his personal time.

Joshua Blum:

Right, yeah, which I think is an important lesson for anybody who's, probably it's anything really, not just for martial arts because even if you are, let's say you go to a couple classes a week, let's say a couple hours out of 160 hours in an average week so, so much of your time is not going to be spent in that studio and so, often you'll hear people say I couldn't train because it's bad weather outside, I had this other thing to do or whatever but there's often something you can do and so many of the things that are shown in this film he's doing are things he's doing by himself in the middle of the night or don't necessarily require that much in terms of equipment or even other person. I think it's just the idea of consistent practice even if it doesn't necessarily look exactly like what your end goal is. There's probably pieces that you can break down and do. I like that they showed that because I think, often, some of these films want to get right to the fighting part without showing all the work that some did to get to that point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah and I think that, I'm guessing, this is why the movie resonated for me, is that it started off being about fighting but it wasn't. Of course, there is that huge plot element in the story arc and I think most martial arts films have that fight aspect, certainly, or they're not martial arts films but I think the fighting in this was so secondary that you almost could take out everything beyond the initial, beyond the elements that create the why of the character and the movie, wow, it would be boring. The outcome would be pretty similar.

Joshua Blum:

I think you're right and I think it's probably one of those reasons why if you were to show this to a very general audience, I think people would be able to appreciate it, not just the martial arts aficionados. I don't know if I would go so far as to call this movie a potential date movie unless your date is another



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martial arts person or into Kung Fu films or whatever but I think it has a more general appeal than some of the other Sunday afternoon Kung Fu theater type there you typically get.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I definitely think it's more generally applicable.

Joshua Blum:

One thing I say is I very rarely have time to watch anything these days so the only time I will typically watch something is in little segments when I'm, I put like a computer in front of a treadmill so I watch this movie in 2 parts, I'll be running at the same time and I actually found that the training montage where he was going through all those toils, I actually found it motivating, I don't know if that says something about me as a person but at the same time while I was running and in pain, I found it sort of motivating to have somebody else also doing the same thing, I guess.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I could see that.

Joshua Blum:

At times, when, I guess, one of my takeaways is I noticed my motivation for whatever in the future if lagging, I may re-watch parts of the film that maybe get to that part because it is. You can see his drive, just like the one part that I mentioned before of jumping over these logs in the water. He can't do it. He tries and tries and tries and then later at night, I think he wakes, he's kicking his legs or whatever in his sleep. He wakes up in the middle of the night, he practices again and again and again and he eventually gets it. He finds a technique that works for him but he wouldn't have gotten there had it been for that practice so I think that's, at least for me, it's good inspiration.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think that's something we can all relate to, for sure. I don't know what else there is to say without spoiling it and I'd rather not do that.

Joshua Blum:

I think the only thing I'll say is that many of these films, but I think this one probably more so and I think this one retains a fair amount of fame, this was influential, I think, for tons of people. There's so much influence of martial arts, particularly like the Kung Fu films. This era of the '70s, early '80s, on the elements like hip-hop, for example, breakdancing that kind of thing, the movements were taken or inspired by people who had different time and place but they saw something in the film. Whether they're inspired by the movements or just the stories of oppression and discrimination or whatever.



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They saw elements of that in their own life and they saw how something, in this case, a physical sort of thing could be helpful so I think, if you look at these films and sort of that historical context, it's kind of interesting. Makes them a little bit more than just a Kung Fu flick.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure and for people who know me personally or know me a little bit better than casually, my preferred music genre is hip-hop so I'd be remiss if I let this show come to an end without mentioning the fact that in that first 30 minutes, the part where I was bored, the part that the thing that kept me most engaged was picking up the samples that the Wu Tang Clan had used mostly in their first album but I picked up some bits that had been used in others and of course, their very first album, Enter the Wu Tang (36 Chambers). It's such a tribute to this film specifically throughout that album and of course, if we got into a discussion on hip-hop we could talk about how that album completely changed the trajectory of hip-hop music so likely no coincidence that this movie was that influential on those gentlemen and starting their career.

Joshua Blum:

Absolutely. Well, I think that's, I don't know if there's other things to mention. I think that's a pretty good place to wrap things up.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is, it is and I think anyone who is not a fan of this genre of movie, this '70s campy Shaw Brothers sort of flick, I think you should give it a chance. I think, once I was done watching it, it was pretty clear to me that there's a reason that this movie specifically is referenced so often that there's something different about it and I spent a little bit of time digging around the web and found that I'm not the only person who feels this way. That this is an excellent example of what those movies could have been and for some reason, this one is.

Joshua Blum:

Yep and I think the, I guess, the applicability today even, this is over 30 years ago, is that even if you're not necessarily involved with martial arts, it's kind of like the movie like The Karate Kid or Rocky. You may be able to take elements of the persistence, don't give up, kind of determination kind of attitude that's exemplified here and probably use it in aspects of your own life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Totally. Alright, I'm good. We good to wind this down, then?

Joshua Blum:



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I think so. It's been a real pleasure talking to you, Jeremy and really, I'm glad that you watched the movie and gave it a chance.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Me too. I'm glad you suggested it because I admittedly, I wouldn't have otherwise.

Joshua Blum:

No, no, no worries.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Want to do this again.

Joshua Blum:

Absolutely. Alright, take care, Jeremy, thanks so much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I had a great time. This is my first time talking with Mr. Blum and I'm glad that I had the chance to. Hopefully, it happens again so thanks for reaching out, Sir. Had a lot of fun, let's stay in touch. Now, of course, you may have picked up that Mr. Blum has his own show, The 13th Hour. We didn't talk about that. In fact, I'm very aware now as I'm recording this outro, we didn't talk about our respective stuff at all but I want you to go find his show. We've got links at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com so go check out his podcast, it's absolutely wonderful. I'm sure you'll enjoy it. Follow him on social media, all that, lets show some love. If you want to show us some love, @whistlekick, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, whistlekick.com, the store, 15% off PODCAST15, rate, review, like, share, comment, all those things. Anything you do, anything you engage with relating to whistlekick helps us so whatever works for you to show your support, ultimately it helps the show grow, it helps whistlekick grow and it makes me feel good. We've all got those days, right? So on those days I feel like things aren't going anywhere, to see a comment or a like or a share, it helps. Helps more than you might imagine. If you want to email me, jeremy@whistlekick.com. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!