



Episode 445 – Ong Bak | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey everybody! Welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 445. Today, I'm joined by guest, Mr. Josh Blum and we're talking about the classic martial arts film, Ong Bak. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host on this show, I'm the founder here at whistlekick. I've been a passionate martial artist all my life and now, it is my job and that's what we're doing here at whistlekick. We're putting in work. We do a lot of different things and if you head to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), you'll see all the things that we've got going on. There's a store there with some products that we make. Things that I've personally designed and if you use the code `PODCAST15`, that's going to get you 15% off every single thing in the store. If you want to know more about this show, go to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You can find a ton of stuff there. We do this show for you twice a week and it's all in support of you, the traditional martial artist and our goal here on martial arts radio is to connect and educate traditional martial artists. It was exactly 20 episodes ago that we brought you the first collaboration between martial arts radio and the 13<sup>th</sup> hour podcast, guest Mr. Josh Blum came on and we chatted about 36 Chamber of Shaolin and here we are, we're back again and we're talking about another classic film, Ong Bak. The debut of Tony Jaa. Well, maybe not technically the debut but the first time, pretty much everyone outside of Thailand had seen him. It's an impressive movie. It's a powerful movie and we get into it so instead of repeating what you're about to hear, I'll just get out of the way and let you listen. So, hey there everybody, here I am. I probably talked to you in the intro but maybe you're getting a different version of the intro and you're not entirely sure



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what's going on with my voice leading this in. I'm Jeremy Lesniak and I'm here with Josh Blum and we're going to talk about Ong Bak.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And this was your idea. We were talking about what movie we're going to talk about next and you suggested Ong Bak which I was embarrassed to say I hadn't actually watched.

**Josh Blum:**

It's a good one. Even, so this came out 2003, I mean, we're talking within a decade and a half later but, I mean, it's a good one. If you're going to watch, I think I have come up or I'd looked at top martial arts film of all time, somewhere or I googled it or something like that and this is a film that was on that list and I would have to agree that it definitely had some high points and I don't think you can go wrong with it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, no and I think it definitely deserves a place on that list. Last time we talked, we talked about 36 Chambers and what I found interesting, as I was watching Ong Bak was just kind of comparing it and contrasting because you kind of have a couple different, you can make a split in movies that you'd think of as martial arts movies. You've got big budget and low budget and you can probably split them off in a lot of different ways but I tend to watch the big budget stuff. I haven't seen a lot of the lower budget stuff. I don't have a lot of time and I figure I've got, if I'm going to watch a movie, I'm going to shoot for something that I know has a better chance of being enjoyable, not just for the martial arts but across the board.

**Josh Blum:**

As an actual movie, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah and something like 36 chambers was fun and I enjoyed it and if you like that movie and you haven't heard our discussion on that, we have it still up, I'm assuming, your episode of it is still up somewhere on your page.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, you can check it out.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, you can go back, you can listen on our conversation on that but one of my criticisms of that movie and I think this is what I'll lead off with on Ong Bak, is that in 36 chambers, it took me some time to get into it. I was like a third of the movie in before I found myself actually caring about what was going on and yet, with this film, very early on, for reasons that I honestly cannot explain, I found myself really into it.

**Josh Blum:**

I think it has something to do with one of the opening scenes is this very weird, almost kind of surreal type of intro where it has all these people and if you haven't seen this film, I'll try to describe it. All these people that are sort of covered in mud and they're climbing this huge tree and you can figure out pretty fast at the idea, it's like a free for all. The idea is to get to the top. It's almost like a capture the flag kind of thing but the characters are basically climbing this tree, fighting with each other, knocking each other off into the ground and we don't actually meet our hero, the character played by Tony Jaa, right away. He's the one that sort of prevails through this whole thing but just a really, really weird opening. I had no idea what was going on with the first time I saw that. I was like what? Is this the same film that I get...did I get the wrong thing?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That tree scene, maybe that was the thing that made it a little more compelling from the get go because you're watching and yet, you have no idea with what's going on and I think that that's intentional and you start watching and you're seeing these people fall out of the tree from fairly high heights and you're watching them and it's clear that this is not some battle for anything of real significance and once I figured out that these people were likely friends or somehow engaged socially but yet they were beating each other out of trees, it was clear that whatever was going on was pretty important and I was just flinching at the way they were falling down and hitting branches.

**Josh Blum:**

The fact that that at least the couple of those falls probably would've, not kill somebody, but landed on the hospital, that kind of thing was wow! It's violent right from basically the first scene and I think that probably sets the stage for the movie as a whole.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, that's a good point. A pretty good anecdote that you've got. Violence, maybe a creative approach to presenting that violence and a plot with people that you're kind of caring about, flinching at despite having no idea what's going on.

**Josh Blum:**



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I will say, I remember when this movie came out, a group of friends of mine have heard about it, this is pre-YouTube. This is probably 2001 or 2002 and someone had found a trailer somewhere and I remember watching the trailer over and over again because they stuck in so many stunts in there that you can find the full thing on the movie but we were heavily into martial arts tricks and stuff like that at the time. That whole scene and community had just sort of like it had been around for a couple of years and so here was like, I don't know if the free running or parkour kind of thing was entirely, I think it was sort of coming around in the same time and there was so much of that in this particular film. I remember us really looking forward to it. I don't think the trailer was even in English but it didn't really matter. I remember having sort of high hopes for the film when I finally got my hands on it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of the things I'm going to look up right now as we're talking, I don't remember what the budget was because that tells us a lot about whether or not it was destined for international release and it grossed 20 million globally and a quarter of that was in the US. Yeah, it's not popping up.

**Josh Blum:**

I got the impression or maybe I read it somewhere that the film was actually created or written specifically for the lead, Tony Jaa but I could be misquoting that but I got the impression that it was something like that. I think, at the time, obviously there was Jet Li and Jackie Chan, though Jackie Chan, I think he was, right around that time, he started transitioning more to the lots of the super crazy stuff and I think he would occasionally use wires here and there just because of age. I think about the same time. I think that was just as true to Jet Li around that time too. I think the role was kind of looking for somebody else that could kind of pass on the mantle. I don't know. That's my recollection of it. It could be entirely apocryphal. I don't know if that seem right to you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, it does. It does. It's a good point. You start seeing movies like Rush Hour that somehow are defined as martial arts movies if you look up box office results even though they're not what most of us would consider as a true martial arts film where the martial arts is the driver of the story. It's not a symptom of the story.

**Josh Blum:**

Whereas this film, the plot as such that it is sort of a throwaway kind of thing. It kind of reminds me of a video game where you have a wave after wave of guys for the main character to beat up and the plot is the main character, I think his name is Tim?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Ting.



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**Josh Blum:**

Ting in the movie. He comes from this village, tiny little village somewhere in the countryside of Thailand and there's a drought. The village is not doing well and they have this protector, the statue called Ong Bak and there's a guy in the village who has since become a criminal element and left for the big city and comes back to basically steal this thing. I was never entirely clear as exactly why but he steals the head of this idol and so, the idea is now the village is screwed and they're going to starve so they need someone to go and rescue the head and so it's basically a barebones kind of a plot for a journey, like a hero's journey kind of thing where the hero doesn't have a whole lot of resources who happens to be like a kickass fighter. We see a little bit of his training but not a whole lot and very quickly launches him into this fast-paced adventure in this city.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, and he's living his village with the love and support of everyone around and they're giving him the little bit of money that they have and hops on this jeep and drives away and, as you said, we don't know much about his training and the little bit we know is what his instructor has told him: don't fight.

**Josh Blum:**

Right, right. if anything, it seemed like maybe he was trained to be a monk. That was the impression I got.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, the idea was that, at least in this village, the statue of Ong Bak is revered. Hesitant to say it's their god but there's a cultural worship happening with this statue and they were people who become monks in service to this very simple temple and this statue and they pray to it in festivals and my sense from the opening scene with the tree was that the person who grab that flag got to do something as part of this festival and this whole mesh of festival holiday kind of deal.

**Josh Blum:**

Sure and it kind of seemed like there were, I think, 2 characters from the movie that had left that village because you can kind of see it. If you didn't want to be a farmer, you didn't want to be a monk, there probably wouldn't be a whole lot for you there and 2 characters had left. One of which is, I actually forget his name, but he's a mustached, sort of wiry guy and he's one of the bad guys and there's another character which the main character goes and finds in the city and he's sort of a prodigal son of the village who's left and maybe had some intention of coming back but never did. Probably doesn't send any money either and he's going to go to the city and find this guy and hopefully, this guy will help him get the statue back.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah, his name was Humlae. Something like that.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, you kind of get the sense that the villagers had a different conception about what Humlae was doing in the city. Humlae is sort of a minor criminal, kind of a hustler, card shark, really just hustling to get by. Not living a lavish lifestyle or anything like that but he doesn't want to return back to the village either. However lousy his life is in the city, however dangerous, it seems like he prefers to what was there for him in the village which I think was to become a monk which I think, he didn't want to do that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I think hustler but I also got a sense that he was a bit of a gambling addict and degenerate.

**Josh Blum:**

Maybe an alcoholic as well. I don't remember that exactly but you kind of get the sense that as soon as he made money, he did not hold on to it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And we see this a couple times through the film.

**Josh Blum:**

I think the first time you see him, I don't know if he loses or he's a manager for a bike race like a motorbike race kind of thing. I can't remember if he loses but he's on the losing end of it but he asks for some money or whatever his share to be paid but I think he ends up, I think part of the deal was he was selling them pills, prescription pills or something like that but they were doctored pills, they were fake, he ends up on the losing end of that transaction but they find out he's trying to sell them for fake and he's trying to cheat other criminals and basically, gets his ass handed to him. He has a sidekick, a young woman, I don't know if it's a girlfriend or sister or something like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hard to say. It's a little ambiguous and I think intentionally so.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, I get the sense that it was someone he wasn't romantically involved with. It sort of like a partner but he was kind of like a big brother style, more of a parental figure to this woman. I think her name is Muay or something like that in the film and so, the main character, Tony Jaa, meets these 2 characters. Sort of bumbling low-level criminals when he first gets to the city. This is his introduction to...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah, of course, it's a martial arts film and we're looking for when is the fight going to happen and he ends up at that underground fight ring, I don't even think that first one had a ring. That was kind of like a basement kind of a deal and he's just...he's Tony Jaa and there's seemingly no transition for him from don't fight, don't fight to just putting these guys down. He doesn't seem to have a struggle with that which I thought was odd and I didn't expect that to be part of the plot line.

**Josh Blum:**

I think the supporting characters were actually a lot better developed than the main character because you actually get a sense that the Humlae character and then, some of the villains, you actually get more sense about kind of who they are as people. Main character, his motivation is to get this head back to this village. That seems to be his motivation. You don't really get a sense of this aside from that, what else he has? Why does that mean so much to him? What exactly would happen if he failed that? it seems like a throwaway plot vehicle for him to bust some heads which he does on numerous occasions with his elbows.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think that's the thing that I find most striking about this movie is the fighting style. I don't, I haven't trained in Muay Thai I have trained with some people that have trained in Muay Thai I have no idea how accurate what he's doing is traditionally. I've read something somewhere along the line, some of his training, if not personally, but for the movie, was actually some older style called Muay Boran. I didn't dig real deep on that to find how accurate that was but a lot of what he's doing looks very classical and in those opening scenes where we see him doing that little bit of training that you mentioned, that doesn't look like it's fight-based. It reminds me more of someone doing a Kung Fu form.

**Josh Blum:**

I think the part where he's doing, in the beginning of the Muay Thai match, they do a little dance. There's probably a right term for it and so, I think, they wanted to inject some of that in there and I got this sense, same with you, I've done some barebones Muay Thai training but not, certainly not in a traditional sense so I got the sense of what he's doing was highly stylized especially the jumping spinning kicks and everything like that that he threw in there. That seemed more of a, especially like the flying elbows, I don't know. I lost track of how many times he jumps up in the air and elbows somebody on the top of the head.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And somehow, each time, or nearly each time, that movement was not blockable. There was nothing they could do. Any other move that he would throw, there was a good shot, they would block it or counter or get out of the way but if he jumped up and completely exposed his torso to come down on the top of their head with an elbow, that was like a Mortal Kombat level finishing move.



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**Josh Blum:**

His groin is right there. Yeah, there's a certain element of that is highly stylized. Obviously, kind of impractical but I think what he was trying to go for, I don't know this for sure, I got the sense that this was like a chance to show the world, I got the sense, it really was, they were aiming for a bigger audience than Thailand. This is Thailand, there is a certain element kind of Thai, kind of nationalism, maybe not nationalism is the right word but maybe sort of patriotism like in those underground fights. I think they fight somebody from the UK and there's like a big, huge guy who makes some jabs and people from Thailand are small and you need Thai boxing but look at me, I'm big. I don't need that kind of thing and there was another guy who was wearing, who looked like he was doing Kung Fu or karate or something like that. He was wearing like a Chinese uniform, Kung Fu uniform and so you get a sense of a country versus country kind of thing here and there was a couple scenes where he makes a point to wrap his hands in a traditional kind of way with cords and everything like that to show that this is my ancestry and I'm going to stay faithful to that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

In my entire knowledge of that with the wrapping of the hand goes back to the movie Kickboxer where apparently, they would, if they were being really extreme, dip those wraps in wax and crushed glass and fight with each other as Jean Claude Van Damme taught us.

**Josh Blum:**

So, who knows there? He uses a couple time, I think there is one time where he's again thrown into a ring and he's going to wrap his hands kind of like that and then at the end, he's wrapping his hands because he has an injury. I got a sense that there's this kind of a go Thailand aspect. This is our own guy and this is the time where we're going to show that Thai boxing can compete in these many other things, at least in a film kind of way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah and of course, the movie quickly shifts from these disorganized fight to tying everything together trying to find the severed head of Ong Bak and the associations that these two petty criminals that he meets and the chaos that ensues there and there's a lot of running around and what I would have to say extremely well-done, well-shot creative choreography through the streets of, I don't know, do we know if it's Bangkok?

**Josh Blum:**

I think it was supposed to be but I don't really know if it's Bangkok but yeah, I remember that sequence where there's that part where he's being chased. I think, in the movie, there's a couple great chases. The one that we're talking about right now is on foot where basically, the Tony Jaa character is being chased by a bunch of, again, a bunch of crooks who felt cheated by his compatriots and they're chasing him. It





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was a very simple kind of thing and he goes running through marketplaces, flipping, dodging, sliding. I remember it was one of the scenes that was in the trailer. I watched that thing over and over again where he does an aerial cartwheel in between 2 sheets of glass and he does this split, sliding underneath a semi or whatever.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, like a truck.

**Josh Blum:**

And there's a bunch of tires and he does like a double front flip off those tires, landing on his feet like a standing full twist coming off of a, I mean, there's all kinds of stuff that he does that, I don't want to say, that is commonplace now but you see at that time, I think, you just didn't see that many people doing that level of athleticism and for all of us who are into all the tricking and everything like that it was like oh my god, this is great! this is awesome! I've done gymnastics and stuff when I was in high school and kind of carried that forward when I found out there's a way to combine martial arts with that and it was up to this point, aside from random clips from people doing it on the internet, considering there wasn't YouTube then, there wasn't like a huge kind of widespread thing. I don't remember seeing a movie where they did as many kind of techniques with this one.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, no. I agree and what I found interesting in most fight scenes, if the star, if anybody is doing anything impressive, I was always struck by it taking me out of the movie. It seemed like it was added. Oh, what cool thing do we plug in here? I'm not going to pretend that someone sliding via a side split under a truck is necessary.

**Josh Blum:**

None of this is necessary, right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

None of it is necessary but there was still kind of in the same way that I found myself caring about the characters early on despite what was happening. A lot of this felt less egregious, less obnoxious than it is in other movies and, again, I'm not quite sure why that is. Maybe because Tony Jaa is so skilled at doing what he's doing or maybe because, in a sense, it fits. What we get through that first chase scene/fight scene is he's trying to get away efficiently as possible and okay, here are 2 panes of glass, I'm just going to side flip through them because it's faster than going around them because I'm that good at doing it because I'm Tony Jaa.

**Josh Blum:**



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Right and it's even more egregious because they slow-mo, like they do it and they actually show that slow motion like replay of it, again, after he's done it. It adds extra impact to it and for some reason, that did not feel annoying when they did that, at least when I was watching it. Maybe it's because, I don't know, maybe it's because what they're trying to do is to showcase this is a cool stunt that we're doing and I think that Jackie Chan has probably done that too but I guess, the sort of sheer variety. I don't know how long that chase took to do. I imagine it must have taken months to film that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah there's a lot there.

**Josh Blum:**

It's like a really action-packed couple of minutes there. If you haven't seen the film, you have no idea what we're talking about, you can probably find that particular scene on YouTube. It's worth watching just for the sheer athleticism of the whole thing. One part where, and they try to inject a little bit of comedy too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Which I appreciated.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, the Humlae character was not as athletic but maybe just to keep up. Tony Jaa jumps through, it looks like honestly, a circular roll of barbed wire. He jumps through it, basically, in a pike position. His feet are straight out, he's curled over his feet and then, he gets through it without any problems and then the Humlae character tries to jump through it again and ends up getting stuck in a barrel or something like that so there was some times where they try to make it kind of humorous.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He did do a pretty good job of providing the comic relief later on, the scene with the knives, I found to be pretty entertaining and maybe that's the magic. Maybe that's what's impressive about this movie is that you get some good choreography but it's balanced out by some humor in a way that we typically see in Jackie Chan films.

**Josh Blum:**

I think that was probably a huge influence and the other thing is in a lot of the Jackie Chan films and Jet Li and stuff like that, the shot is far enough away that you can actually see the action happening and it stays on the people who are actually in the shot. It doesn't cut out. I think this was around the time where they start to shoot from multiple different angles and they kind of mash them all together in a way that you couldn't actually see the action happening continuously. It would go from one angle to the



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next to the next. I don't know if that's because they were trying to make some camera trick to make it look better than it actually was but they don't need that for this film. It's just from far away, it's panned out and you just watch the whole action happen as it did exceptionally as it did the instant replays.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, for sure.

**Josh Blum:**

I think, for the fight scenes, as they are, I almost kind of find there's these quick cuts that they're changing it a little bit. It's kind of annoying, I guess it makes it easier to choreograph? I don't know. I feel that sort of thing takes you out of the experience a lot more than if they just let it, let the actors do their thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It gives more license to do things that the actors don't have the skill to actually do and it allows them to swap in stunt doubles without us realizing it as much. I'm going to guess that Tony Jaa doesn't have a stunt double for anything in this film. I didn't look that up but his face is visible in everything, from what I recall.

**Josh Blum:**

I read he didn't so I don't know how I've heard that is but I think he was following the lead of Jackie Chan who I think, for the most part, has not used stunt doubles. I don't know if that's still the case anymore but at that time, whenever this was filmed, early 2000s, I think that was still the case where he's doing his own stunts so yeah, I mean, that's a really tough sort of bar to live up to and I don't even know, this is one of those things that if this film was made in this country or the budget were higher, I wonder how much they would allow the lead to do some of the things that they did. There is one scene where his pants are on fire! Do you remember that scene where for whatever reason he's in an explosion and he jumps out and does an, I don't know, whatever 900, whatever, I forgot how many revolutions and kicked some guy while his whole lower body is on fire and I read that he actually got burned in the process. He went to the hospital multiple different times. The flames, I think, actually burned his arms or other parts of his upper body and he's not wearing any protective stuff on his arm. They're bare so I imagine that that probably wouldn't have flown if that was done in this country but I could see something like that happening like in those 70s or early 80s Hongkong films where they're sort of the movie is basically a vehicle for the main character, that lead actor and they're not so much concerned with what happens if he breaks his leg and whatever, he gets 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns and they're just hoping that didn't happen, I guess.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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At that time, he wasn't a star so he was a calculated risk. If they lost him, I hate to say that, but I suspect that that was part of it. This is probably a pretty low budget movie, I'm going to guess, 2 to 5 million and if they get one movie out of him then so be it.

**Josh Blum:**

I guess, some of the other scenes, there's one other chase scene that comes to mind that's also, again, I don't know how long it took for them to do this but if you look at some of the chase scenes, they're probably influenced by, I'm sure, plenty other western movies like, for some reason, the police car scene in the Blues Brothers or other scenes like that but I was also thinking like Terminator 2 or something. Big budget kind of stuff where there's a highway and it's a chase scene where there's a flood of destruction but they're using a Thai staple, those little tuk-tuk 3-wheeled vehicles, little almost like tricycle style motorcycle with a roof on the back that you see in Thailand.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

They reminded me like a small moped. Like a moped and a horse-drawn carriage had a baby.

**Josh Blum:**

And it was very creatively done where they're chasing each other. It had a, this is going to sound bad but it's not meant like, it's going to sound like a dollar general version of a chase scene from Terminator 2, like big vehicles and stuff like that. It had a very in-country feel for it. They're not using cars, they're not using trucks, they're not using airplanes, they're using the local form of transportation because they could've used bicycles or whatever but this was a whole lot faster. That particular scene where they're chasing each other and fighting on top of these things, I think blended a unique flavor.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It was fun and I think that that's a recurring theme through the film. It was that they were probably limited, they were probably hamstrung a bit by the budget but instead of making cheesy attempts to stretch the budget, they said well, what can we do and let's make the best of that and that's what we end up with and I think that that is the magic here. You've got a character and an actor who is unknown before this film and, let's face it, probably without this film would not have had the opportunities that he had. I mean, Tony Jaa is pretty amazing. I suspect he would have gone on to greatness at some point but I don't think you can deny that this film catapulted him and if you look at that entire philosophy, I guess, through the film, it's making the most with very little and it works.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah and that's one of the things that I kind of enjoy watching other countries do this and even aside from movies like when you see somebody training in another country, especially in a country that's less developed than, say, US or other places in the western world, they're doing so much for just very little



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and you realize how little do you actually need to actually get good at something and here was somebody who, I think, so I was reading a little bit of his bio. I think he had actually trained specifically in a number of different arts as well like gymnastics and wushu and things like that so he already had a fair amount of constant training but aside from, say, him, if you look at some of the people, some of the Thai boxers, stuff like that, they come out of Thailand, the training is very regimented and stuff like that but I think a lot of the conditions these guys are training in are pretty different from a posh gym or whatever in the US so I don't know. It kind of feels like an interesting thing that you don't necessarily need a lot to get good at something.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We can talk about the end, I guess? It's pretty dramatic and interesting and left me scratching my head in a few places.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, there's one thing while we're leading up to that. I don't know what it attempts to achieve but before the Tony Jaa character leaves his village, he's given this thing that kind of looks like a blunt or something like that. It's just like this special medicine. Don't use this. save this for when you really need it. It's really kind of like a videogame. This is your power-upper, like one-upper or whatever if you're dying, use this which he uses at the very end and I kind of wonder, so what is the secret country Thai medicine? Is it something that they ground up or is it PCP or something like that that could dull the pain. So, he uses it at the very end to counter some of the other, one of the other guys who seems impervious to pain. I thought it was kind of a funny scene, maybe unintentionally funny where they, because that's what's running through my head is that they gave him this...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm going to guess if it was anything authentic it was Kratom.

**Josh Blum:**

Oh, interesting.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I mean, we can take a hard left and talk about Kratom but I don't think it's a good use of our time as we do a movie review but yeah, to counter the effects of what, I'm assuming, was some kind of amphetamines in 5 syringes that he injected directly into his heart. I mean, I'm watching that and the only thing going through my mind is he is now prepared for his last battle. Doesn't matter if you win or you lose, you're not going to make it through this one.

**Josh Blum:**



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Yeah, as a slight detour to this film, the only thing I thought, I think in general, the flow and everything was really good. Obviously, there's a lot of violence so there's that but there's definitely an injected fair amount of seediness into the film. I'm not sure it needed it because I don't know if, I think that's a stereotype that people I think have of Thailand. Sex and drugs and that kind of thing. I don't know if you needed that kind of sympathy for the characters because I know that the bad guys were bad but there's a fair amount of that so, kids, if you're listening, there are some wanton drug use.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, it's a modern city, gritty movie and I don't know that it was needed but I think it would have been odd if it wasn't portrayed.

**Josh Blum:**

It kind of reminds me, I don't know if you've seen this movie, Showdown in Little Tokyo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I haven't.

**Josh Blum:**

Brandon Lee and Dolph Lundgren. It's almost that kind of film where it's portraying an element of society that's not the best so, at least, there's a fare of R-rated stuff in there. So, about the end.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, let's talk about what he stumbles on and I have to admit, there must've been some symbolism there between them working on removing the head of this very large Buddhist statue and the beginning with removing the head of the Ong Bak statue but I didn't get what the symbolism is trying to say.

**Josh Blum:**

I didn't either.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm glad I'm not the only one then.

**Josh Blum:**

Some of the way the plot kind of hung together, I don't know. Maybe, part of it maybe is lost in translation or something like that. The copy that I was using, the audio and the subtitles were a little bit off sync so I may have missed a few things but in the chase scene, actually, with the little tuk-tuks, one of them goes into the water carrying one of the henchmen and then, Tony Jaa and then while he's



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coming and he's trying to save himself in the water. He coming to the surface and he's covering all these artifacts that are sort of suspended underwater.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh right, glad I didn't miss that important brief.

**Josh Blum:**

And the main bad guy was just sort of pillaging this sort of like national treasures and I guess, maybe trying to sell them, I guess? I was thinking what would he wanted it for and then they show him, this other bad guy is in a wheelchair, he talks through one of those little things that people use if they have a tracheotomy and they actually show him smoking through that hole in this throat.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Which was just gross.

**Josh Blum:**

I don't know if they needed that but, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't like gross, I don't watch horror movies because of the gross that generally comes with them, that was one of those moments, I think, maybe the only moment in this movie where I averted my eyes because I don't need to see someone smoking from their tracheotomy.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, right. It just kind of show how much, it's almost like the antithesis of the main character. This guy can't even walk and is physically unable to do the things the main character does including like talk. He's smoking through his tracheotomy, whatever, but he's, in addition to pillaging artifacts and hiding them underwater, there's a cave where there's a huge Buddha, I think it's a Buddha, I'm not really sure, that he's trying to remove the head from. Again, not really sure why he's doing that or what the purpose of that would be for but he wants it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm assuming it's sale. I know that antiquities, there's a black market for that. Why they would still have value being just the head and not the entire statue? In case of the one at the end, massive and challenging enough to move just the head. I mean, we see what happens when the head falls off somebody.

**Josh Blum:**



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Yeah, what went through my head was that okay, so you're going to take this thing. Exactly how are you going to get it out of the mouth of the cave? Exactly how are you going to do that? How are you going to move it but whatever that's beside the point but he's a bad guy, he's stealing national treasures and he's got a bunch of people protecting him, one of which is this guy who seems like a pretty good fighter in his own right but uses, how shall we say, chemical means to enhance himself including sticking a whole bunch of syringes in his heart as well for this thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It was kind of ridiculous but, to the credit of the choreographer, when I saw them happen when the two get up and they're about to fight, I was expecting your very typical end of the movie boss fight scene that goes on way too long and the hero is beaten within an inch of his life and somehow finds the strength to persevere and it wasn't that.

**Josh Blum:**

Like every Rocky movie.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah! It wasn't that. It was far more balanced and far shorter than I would have guessed.

**Josh Blum:**

The hero does emerge without a lot of cuts and bruises and wounds along the way but it definitely wasn't as drawn out as it could've been so those two characters, the main, sort of the second in command guy who sticks the syringe through his heart, they have fought once before so you get a preview of it, I guess, and it's was as brutal as you might expect although in the second confrontation, our hero has the benefit of, I don't know, maybe this Kratom or some of those kind of stuff that where he's also impervious to pain.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Kratom was not that magical. It's an interesting substance but it's not nearly magical.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, so whatever it was, he becomes impervious to pain. There's this part where he's just getting kicked and he kind of just shrugs it off and they make use of the, I think that was a nice use of a couple different things where they show elements of the Thai boxing, unless you watch it closely, you can lose it amid the stylized jumping and spinning and that kind of thing. You can see him going for the leg or for the inside of the thighs. You can see him fighting with his elbows close in. He didn't have to stick that in because he could probably get by with the bigger and flashier moves but I thought that was nice that they did. They keep it kind of true to the overall what they're trying to convey that is their style.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely and then, of course, it ends in the warm, fuzzy sort of way. He gets the head and goes back and all is well.

**Josh Blum:**

Right, there is a sequel.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Two of them.

**Josh Blum:**

Yes, Ong Bak 2.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

At least 2 of them. I'm aware of 2 of them.

**Josh Blum:**

Which don't have, I remember watching the sequel when it came out. I haven't seen the 3<sup>rd</sup> one. I don't know if you know anything about it but the sequel's very weird. It's one of those ones where it's like a spiritual sequel, it's not really a direct thing. We don't see anything more of this particular character or his village or anything like that but we see, it's like a precursor. It's like several hundred years before and they had a lot more money with that one but the plot got, I couldn't follow the plot. It was very convoluted. It was kind of those ones where I kind of want to re-watch. Maybe I'll re-watch it at some point and see it if it kind of makes sense because I think the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> one go together as one but if you only see one, I think this is the one to see.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What I find interesting is that Tony Jaa was one of the directors and the writers for that second one.

**Josh Blum:**

Oh, interesting. Ok.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I suspect that, the numbers are all over the place here whereas the first did 20 million, this one did 9 globally. Domestic gross here in the US was a \$100,000. It tanked but, I suspect that, if you're interested in following Tony Jaa's career, digging into the 2<sup>nd</sup> movie and how he got from star to this second movie



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and directing and writing and being involved in that level is probably fascinating but a little bit beyond what we would go into here.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, I think there's, I don't exactly remember, I don't know if you, there's probably numerous people who have been influenced by this particular period, maybe this movie but I know for everybody who did martial arts tricks and stuff like that, for example, you had a [00:49:23] everyone sort of from that era, they can identify with so many things in this particular film. There was more and more motivation to go out and try those things and now, the level that people had gotten to is so incredible. I mean, it may have happened there anyway and I don't know how much this film necessarily helped that but it certainly didn't hurt.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, and if you were at all a fan of Into the Badlands, you saw a lot of this style of movement that, certainly, the cinematography is dramatically different but this style of choreography happened constantly.

**Josh Blum:**

You know Scott Adkins? He's a British guy. He did a bunch of stuff but a very acrobatic kind of guy. I forgot which style he does, maybe karate or something like that, very good martial artist in his own right but he's had a career that's fairly similar but maybe a couple years later, he's also been very acrobatic, he's also been in a lot of films. There's a couple with Jean Claude Van Damme. He did a film, I think, it was just entitled Ninja and there may have been a 2<sup>nd</sup> one where he was the lead. It was one of his earlier roles. There's a series of movies inside a prison.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He did do the Ninja films, yeah.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, where he's this Russian guy. I think he's Yuri Boyka?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The Boyka movies? Yeah. There's a couple of those.

**Josh Blum:**

They were all pretty low budget. Some of them were direct to video but he's a very similar kind of performer. Great acrobatic ability and I would, I don't know obviously, but I would imagine it was



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probably influenced by, if not necessarily by this movie, but by people who are doing this kind of stuff at that time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I bet we can pinpoint Ong Bak as a moment in time where the choreography move forward. We talk about martial arts and it progressing and growing and looking at what martial artist do today versus 10, 20 years ago, what's happening on film is continuing to escalate. You go back to the '60s and '70s and you see what was being done on film and it very simple, very basic and, not to say that those movies aren't great and there aren't aspects to them that I enjoy, but you could not get away in 2019 doing not only that kind of choreography but something from the '90s.

**Josh Blum:**

Sure. Yeah. It would be interesting, I guess one of the things that I'm most kind of interested with is as these folks get older, and I think you see this with Jackie Chan, with Jet Li is they have to, they can't keep this level of physical up to this level. Your body just will not tolerate that. Well, maybe some people can in their 40s and 50s. I don't know how old he was in this movie but he looks fairly young and I imagine...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He was born in '76 so in '03, he would have been...

**Josh Blum:**

He's in his mid-20s which is probably at his mid-twenties where is at his peak. I have to say, I saw a clip of him, you can go on his Facebook or something like that where it shows a training session for him doing a of the same kind of moves, I guess, probably training for another movie where he looks just about as good and that was in 2014 so it was just a couple years ago. I guess it's really impressive to maintain that level of ability that long but at some point, he won't be able to do that and to see how those movies kind of evolve over time that they become more story-driven, that they focus more on character development and I think we're trying to see that with Jackie Chan.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

For sure.

**Josh Blum:**

Which I think, I think we've talked about this before. A martial arts movie is you're not really watching it for the movie. I can only think of maybe one movie where it's, I actually I enjoy the movie which is like Big Trouble in Little China or something. Not even a true martial arts movie. You only watch a true martial arts movie for a very specific thing and so, it's kind of in a way helps broaden the genre. Maybe



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there's a little bit of martial arts but then, there's actually a well-crafted story behind that character development.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, and which is risky. I imagine it's risky to spend all that time doing that and knowing people are going to fast-forward it and we could, I'm avoiding making the direct allusion to something else that people say the same thing about, I think the implication is probably clear.

**Josh Blum:**

Sure, yeah. Well, any last words?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, it was a good movie. I'm glad I watched it. If anybody out there has not seen it, it's definitely worth the time especially since it's where we get to meet Tony Jaa.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, I agree. If we made it sound weird in some way, just know that it's also a fun movie, I think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a good word for it. The action is good, the movie is fun and there are point, I mean, as you said, it can be weird and you don't always know what's going on but you don't mind.

**Josh Blum:**

You're kind of along for the ride. It's one of those things where you really don't have to think very hard. You can check your brain, turn it off for a little while and just appreciate what's going on in the screen and there's a place for that as well. It's kind of like the equivalent of like a pulp store novel or something like that. To some degree, there's definitely a place for that sort of thing. You can take short break from your day. Yeah, that's Ong Bak. I don't know Jeremy. I think one of the things we wanted to do was neither of us have seen and then, try to review that which is maybe still a good thing to do. I'm happy to do this again.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely!

**Josh Blum:**

I'll keep looking.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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It's good for me because you're good at this. You are doing a better job at taking notes and remembering things than I am so it's forcing me to step my game up which I appreciate.

**Josh Blum:**

I wish I could utilize those skills for more useful things than, I think I should be a movie critic in another life or a viewer.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Maybe. Hey, if you want to review movies for martial journal, we're always taking people.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, Jeremy, it's been so much fun doing this. I'm glad that we agreed on this one because like I said, I haven't seen this one in a long time. Last time I saw it was probably shortly after it came out. I'm not really sure why but it is what it is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know what would be fun? Maybe in the future, we do a, we could experiment with a live viewing party. We pick something on Netflix and kind of count it down and watch as an event. I've speculated that that would not be well-attended but the people that would be involved would greatly enjoy it.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, sort of commentary as it kind of happens. That's an interesting idea. I don't know how you'd do that with, I guess we could do that. Something we could think about.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I was imagining 2 screens, watching it on 1 screen and having Facebook open on the other and doing it that way.

**Josh Blum:**

That would be a fun thing. I think you have a bigger audience but if anybody who's interested in that sort of thing would be open to participating or think that would be interesting, just let us know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Totally.

**Josh Blum:**

Check Jeremy out, [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), anything else you want to plug?



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Whistlekick.com, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You start at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), you'll find everything.

**Josh Blum:**

Yeah, you can find this podcast, in addition to on Jeremy's show, in my website [13thhr.wordpress.com](http://13thhr.wordpress.com) and numerous other podcasting platforms. iTunes, Stitcher and Spotify, that kind of thing so if you have any questions or comments, leave a comment or question there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely and hopefully, people are listening to both shows. They better be.

**Josh Blum:**

The other thing, you'll see a link in the show notes, at least for mine, I'll try to stick a show note link to our previous collaboration which is the 36 Chambers of Shaolin. If you haven't seen that movie, there's another one to maybe worth the watch and a listen. Alright, man, it's a pleasure. Thanks so much!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There are far more martial arts films than I'm ever going to be able to watch and as much as I enjoy them, maybe in different ways depending on the film, I just don't have time and so that's why I appreciate Mr. Blum reaching out and saying hey, here are a handful of films that you might appreciate. With 36 Chambers, with Ong Bak, I'm watching movies that are classic but I haven't had the push that I needed to check them out so I want to thank Josh for the push and the encouragement and joining me today, had a lot of fun and I want you all to stay tuned. There's some stuff we're talking about that might take this whole thing a little bit further, fingers crossed. Head to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), check out the show notes for this episode, for all of the other episodes, sign up for the newsletter and really just get in on everything going on. If you want to know more about the show, go to Facebook, search for whistlekick martial arts radio behind the scenes, there's a private group, we'll let you in unless you seem really sketchy. We'll probably let you in. We let almost everybody in and that's where we have announcements and behind the scenes and sometimes some good conversation so check that out. If you go to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), this is where you're going to see everything that we do. Blogs, links to other projects, the entirety of what whistlekick is online and if you buy something in the store, use the code PODCAST15, that gets you 15% off. You can also see a lot of what we do at Amazon. If you want to help us out, there are a handful of ways you can do that. You can make a purchase, you can share an episode. You can like us on social media. You can leave us a review. Anything that seems like it will be helpful to us would be really appreciated. Helps us keep the company going, keep the lights on. If you have suggestions for future topics or guests, there's a form at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) that you can fill out. Let us know who you think I should talk to or what topic should we unpack. Our social media is



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pretty simple. It's @whistlekick everywhere you can imagine. My email is [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). We keep it easy. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!