
The Protector

Posted by Mark - 2007/02/06 03:51

The Protector

*** 1/2 (out of five)

There is a scene early in Prachya Pinkaew's, *The Protector*, where Tony Jaa hustles through a crowded airport and accidentally bumps into another man. The two then instinctively and simultaneously turn to face each other, fight postured, till it becomes clear to both that there is no need for alarm. The other man is Jackie Chan, who soon breaks the tension with a smile and an apology, and turns to go on his way. This scene is very reminiscent of one from Peter Berg's, *The Rundown*, where The Rock brushes past a nightclub patron (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger) who says, "Good luck." In both instances we witness a passing of the guard, and given that Chan is one of Jaa's longtime heroes, we can be certain he privately internalized the profundity of the moment.

The Protector is a story about a young man named Kham, whose family has reared elephants for generations that stretch back to the days when the kings of Thailand relied on the size and strength of the giants to thwart enemies in times of war. Tragedy strikes when a contingent of thugs kidnap the grandest elephant in Kham's herd, as well as the elephant's calf, fatally shooting Kham's father in the process. Kham's father expends his dying breath on a plea for Kham to rescue the elephants, and with this wish forever engraved into his heart, Kham bolts to the quest and never slows down.

What follows are some of the most impressive stunts and fighting scenes on record, resulting largely from Tony Jaa's commitment to martial arts training and his sheer athleticism. For instance, consider a scene where Jaa breaks the will of a would-be attacker on an open street corner. In one fluid motion, Jaa leaps against the post of a streetlamp, and then using one foot to redirect himself further upwards, contorts his body into a backflipping scissor kick that shatters the glass enclosure overhead. As Jaa lands squarely on his feet, his unspoken message to the assailant is clear: Retire, or taste thy folly.

Up to the task of capturing Jaa's talents is Pinkaew. He directs several scenes using a single shot, including a four minute scene where Jaa fights his way to the top of a huge staircase teeming with adversaries. Impressive for all its scale and force, the scene illustrates a curiosity in *The Protector* some viewers may stumble on. That is the incredible number of foes Kham is able to defeat on his own, at the same time. In one scene, Kham uses a style of muay Thai called "elephant boxing" to cripple goon after goon, until one can barely see the floor through the number of broken bodies lying on top of it. You'd be correct to point out that should a single bad guy have thought to carry a firearm, the fight would have been over before it started. But if you suspend your disbelief ahead of time you'll see *The Protector* for what it is: a high-flying, high-octane martial arts meteor-ride that does the tradition of Jackie Chan proud.

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Re:The Protector

Posted by Mike - 2007/02/06 13:16

What a great review! I'm really glad you added that tidbit about Jaa running into Jackie Chan. That is really a cool scene for them to have added and it makes me want to see it even more. My first encounter with a Tony Jaa movie was *Onk Bak*. The protector seems like it has a very similar style. If this movie is anywhere near as good as *Onk Bak* then it is certainly a must see for anyone into martial arts. I believe that Jaa also does all of his own stunts and that, at least for the protector, special effects weren't used to the effect that it was Jaa by himself doing all those athletic moves, no ropes, strings, etc. Thanks again for the great review. Take care.
-mike

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