

Romeo Must Die

...but not before kicking ass...

BY MARK EVANS

The Academy Award for Best Picture in 2001 will not go to this movie. C'mon, let's be realistic here. Some movies are deliberately made because studios think they'll get Oscars, others are made because they know people will go see them. *Romeo Must Die* is square in the latter category. It exists for no other purpose than to entertain, and there's no doubt that it does just that.

Jet Li is a successful Hong Kong actor, who made his American debut as the villain of *Lethal Weapon 4*. This is his first starring role in an American film, and he handles himself very well. He

proves he has the moves and talent to handle a major motion picture.

Li plays Han, an ex-cop who comes to America after his brother is killed as an apparent warning tactic in a tense situation between rival black and Chinese gangs. While on the trail of the killer, he meets up with Trish (Aaliyah), the daughter of the head of the black gang. The two become fast friends and when Trish's brother also gets murdered they decide to join forces.

So, clearly, the movie is a pseudo-retelling of *Romeo & Juliet*. Except there's no Friar, no double suicide, no sword fights, and if there was a sonnet I probably missed it over the sound of punches, kicks,

and broken bones. Han and Trish's relationship is far more friendly than anything Shakespeare envisioned too. They both seem attracted to each other, but they stay on a strictly platonic level with the hint that things might develop later.

Acting? Whatever.

Well, fine, it's not that non-existent, and Trish and Han have a nice subdued chemistry with one another. But don't kid yourself, the plot exists solely to line up butt for kicking in the immediate or near future. I have to admit I sort of missed the hilariously awful dubbing present in Hong Kong movies of this type, especially Jackie Chan's, but Jet Li speaks great Eng-



Li and Aaliyah — platonic with hints of "later."

lish and since this is an American film dubbing wouldn't make much sense.

The aforementioned butt is kicked exceptionally well in this movie. There are a number of excellent fight scenes throughout the film and I won't go into too much detail since some are both clever and surprising. Some of the camera work during a couple is a bit too rushed, however, and can make it a bit difficult to follow the action. This only happens occasionally though.

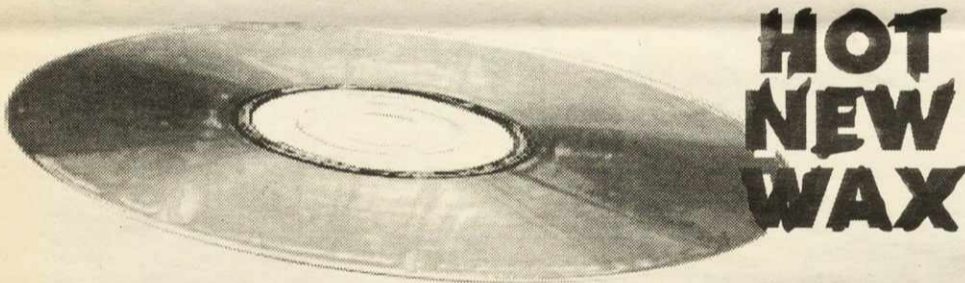
Romeo Must Die also employs a couple cinematic tricks, one of which is clever and the other of which is not exactly subtle or successful. The first is an x-ray bone cam that shows bones being broken during the fight scenes. It's cute and isn't used so much that it becomes a real detractor — although the people I saw the movie with weren't quite as fond of it.

The second gimmick is one that appears quite a bit in Hong Kong cinema, and that's the use of wires for impossible martial arts moves, aka 'wire-fu.' They used this a lot in *The Matrix* and it was also featured substantially in *Black Mask*, one of Jet Li's earlier films

that was released domestically just last year. Both of those films use this to great effect and it's definitely fun to watch.

However, both of those movies are based in a 'fantasy' type setting while *Romeo* is supposedly set in the 'real world' — or as near as you can get in an action movie. So while it does look neat when they use it in the movie, it's still a big distraction because it takes away from the choreography of the fight scenes. Trust me, the action in this film is so good that it can easily stand on its own, it doesn't need any wires to hold it up. Ironically both these special effects get used in the final fight scene and make it less impressive than it could have been.

Bottom Line: Some people would argue that Jet Li should've taken down both Riggs & Murtagh at the end of *Lethal Weapon 4*; the proof is in this film. Some of the camera work isn't great, but the fight scenes tend to be well choreographed and deliver where it counts. It even has a plot that won't put you in a coma while you wait for more fists to fly. If you like martial arts movies in the least, you'll probably find plenty to enjoy here. Three stars out of four.

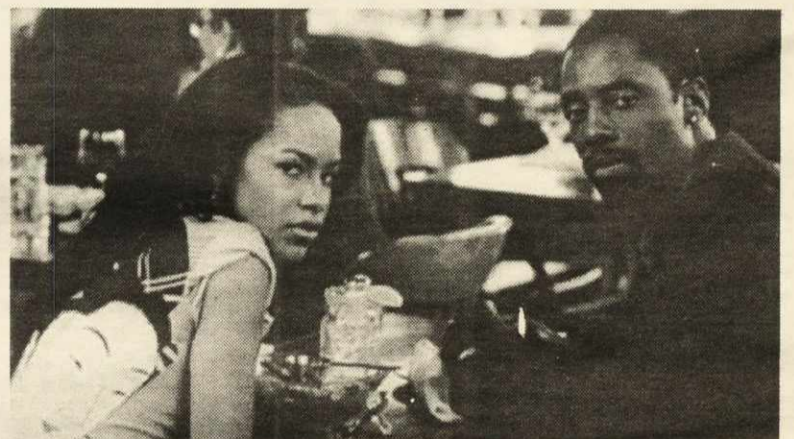


Pinehurst Kids — Viewmaster (4 Alarm)

If you cats haven't heard yet, the post-hardcore scene is happenin' and any college rock station will tell you the goods. Ah, but emo-pop-punk-backpackkid rock, will you ever learn? You can't all just sound like the **Get up Kids**, the **Promise Ring**, **Jimmy Eat World**, or **Superchunk** because eventually people are going to realize that they may as well just listen to the originals and then the scene will be lost. That said, this record is good and does sound like all those bands at times, so I'll listen to it for a while; but ask me next year and I'll still be listening to **TGUK** and the **Promise Ring**, but the **Pinehurst Kids**? naw man. — Jon.

Modest Mouse — Building Nothing Out of Something (Up)

This record is a big broom, sweeping up all dust from the corners of the room that houses the career of **Modest Mouse** and collecting it into a big pile in the middle of the floor. Consider it a spring-cleaning before the band embarks on their major label phase — which will be underway with their fall release, on Epic/Sony. Mostly a collection of 7" 's and rare vinyl, this record also has the out-of-print *Interstate 8* EP onboard. A solid reflection of the band's 5 years to date - it's lineup changes and development. Really if you've ever liked a **Modest Mouse** track, there's a lil' something of that, no doubt, at some point on this record, it's just real good like that. — Jon.



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