

## COME DRINK WITH ME

Directed by King Hu  
(1966) Arrow Video Blu-ray

For casual fans of martial arts cinema, a classic film like *Come Drink With Me* can easily slip beneath one's radar, thanks perhaps to its title, which makes it sound more like a musical romance than a fight-fest, or the fact that it is seldom mentioned in the same breath with 42<sup>nd</sup> Street-era Kung Fu flicks like *Master of the Flying Guillotine* or *King Boxer*. In fact, *Come Drink with Me*

predates the body of cinema we think of as the Kung Fu genre by several years, with a release date of 1966, nearly a decade before martial arts films reached their mid-70s popularity peak. Nonetheless, fans of Asian action flicks owe it to themselves to give this one a look. Part historical costume drama, part fantasy-infused combat epic, *Come Drink with Me* is one of the best examples of the Wuxia film, a genre which generally takes ancient China as its setting and typically pits various clans against one another in heavily choreographed battle scenes. Think less grittiness and more flying on wires in colorful period dress. The Wuxia genre was later distilled into what we think of the 70s Kung Fu genre, with hand-to-hand combat supplanting classic swordplay and ritualized brutality replacing visual elegance—but not in a bad way. Wuxia films often take their inspiration from Chinese opera and its formalized, showy depiction of historical and mythic conflict.

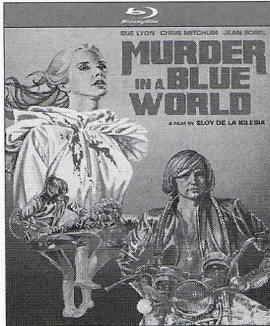
The story concerns Golden Swallow (Cheng Pei-pei), a female warrior of the Ming Dynasty period sent to rescue her brother from a group of bandits led by Jade Face Tiger (Chen Hung-lieh), who hopes to use the brother as a bargaining chip against her powerful military family. Along the way, Golden Swallow forms an uneasy alliance with Drunken Cat (Yueh Hua), a talented martial artist masquerading as a besotted vagrant. Drunken Cat shows up from time to time to lend Golden Swallow a hand when the bandits are about to triumph. It turns out that Drunken Cat also has a personal beef with the head monk at the monastery where the bandits hole up. This dispute, which dates back years and involves conflicted feelings of loyalty and betrayal from both sides, plays out against the more straightforward backdrop of Golden Swallow's campaign to free her brother. As you might imagine, both struggles are resolved in climactic battles at the picture's end.

If any (or all) elements of the above plot description sound familiar, it's likely because *Come Drink With Me* is one of the most influential Hong Kong films of all time. Produced by the Shaw Brothers and directed by the legendary King Hu as his final effort for the studio before moving to Taiwan, the film effortlessly balances character nuance with complex fight choreography. While it includes musical elements and other presentational tropes from Chinese opera, the film also pushed the envelope for its original audiences with bloodier special effects than the typical Wuxia. Although the fight scenes focus much more on stylish sword fighting than Kung Fu fisticuffs, the film arguably represents a transitional step towards the next generation of martial arts cinema.

Arrow Video has stepped forward with an admirably upgraded high-definition edition of *Come Drink With Me*, presented in its proper Shawscope widescreen aspect ratio with faithful DTS-HD Master Audio Mono versions of its original Mandarin and English soundtracks (with optional English and English SDH subtitles, of course). The image quality is quite good in most instances, although the elements (provided by Shaw Brothers) have evidently not undergone a formal restoration. There is occasional color fading, along with other issues associated with aging source material, but there is more than enough eye-popping pageantry on display throughout the film to make up for its scattered and comparatively subtle visual shortcomings.

In addition to this more or less definitive presentation of the film itself, Arrow has spiced up the package with a robust set of extras, starting with an informative commentary track from Asian film scholar Tony Rayns. The average Western viewer (who is not a rabid and dedicated Hong Kong film buff) is likely to need a little help appreciating a picture like *Come Drink With Me*, whose cast, creative hands, and historical context may be entirely unfamiliar. Rayns does a fine job of introducing the film to the uninitiated while providing enough detailed history and analysis to keep more informed viewers interested. Also welcome are a trio of lengthy interview featurettes, which range in duration from about 30 minutes to almost an hour, with lead actors Cheng Pei-pei, Yueh Hua, and Chen Hung-lieh. We also get a shorter fan event Q&A video with Cheng Pei-pei, a nearly hour-long documentary on the art of sword fighting in Shaw Brother films, and the usual trailers and image galleries. The first pressing also has a booklet of essays on the picture by Anne Billson and George Chun Han Wang.

Chris Herzog



## MURDER IN A BLUE WORLD

Directed by Eloy de la Iglesia  
(1973) Caudron Films Blu-ray

Under the rule of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, Spanish filmmakers of the early 1970s were often forced to use genre films as a Trojan horse to smuggle in social criticisms of fascism and its repressive effects on society. Arguably, no one was better at doing this than Eloy de la Iglesia, who, as a gay man and avowed Communist, had more to lose under Franco's regime than others. De la Iglesia made a series of suspense and horror titles in this period, including *Cannibal Man*

and *No One Heard the Scream*, which manage to tackle some very subversive material that lurks just below their deliberately outrageous surfaces. For its part, *Murder in a Blue World* lashes together two seemingly disparate genres: the near-future dystopias of contemporary science fiction cinema and the stalk-and-kill ethos of the giallo film.

The shadow looming largest over de la Iglesia's film is Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, which is explicitly referenced in an early home invasion sequence similar to the one in that film. There's also a subplot involving scientific efforts to experimentally cure deviant, violent behavior, akin to the Ludovico treatment in *Clockwork*. According to de la Iglesia, these elements were shoehorned in after viewing Kubrick's film, falling somewhere between homage and parody. It's true that they do not form the real narrative backbone of *Murder in a Blue World*. That belongs to Ana (Sue Lyon), a nurse on a murderous mission of mercy.

An early conversation with a dying patient provides Ana with her rationale: Most people don't really live, he claims, they only shamble around like the living dead. If Ana kills them, it's only to put them out of their misery. But, in fact, her killings also serve a chilling dual purpose, because she singles out victims who do not conform to society's ideals of fitness and "moral decency." She targets in turn a cripple, a male prostitute, and a conflicted homosexual. In keeping with de la Iglesia's general identification with the outsider, these figures are presented more or less sympathetically. (Not so much the gigolo, who's basically a figure of satire.) Ana, on the other hand, comes across as cold and remote, almost mechanical in her actions.

The world of de la Iglesia's film is saturated with media, much like our own. The film opens with an advert for a drink called Blue (hence the title); Ana attends an auction for comic strip art; TV programs and news shows feature prominently; and, in another cinematic in-joke, we see Ana reading Nabokov's *Lolita*, which Kubrick filmed in 1962 starring none other than Sue Lyon. TV spots from government agencies serve the Orwellian function of thought control, being a prop for proper conduct and right thinking.

Elsewhere there's a quartet of red-helmeted, dune buggy-driving hoodlums responsible for the aforementioned home invasion. While his mates drag off both husband and wife for violation, David (Chris Mitchum) opts instead to lay waste to the family's living room, suggesting that his destructiveness is of an essentially asexual nature. This is further attested to when he decides to blackmail Ana after witnessing her disposing of one of her victims in the river, demanding money from her rather than sexual favors. At bottom, David is no real outsider; he's just too proudly "useless" to go after what he wants.

An eleventh hour run-in with his former gang members leaves David hospitalized, where he's soon in the clutches of Ana's boyfriend, Dr Victor Sender (Jean Sorel), and his behavior modification experiments. This leads inevitably to a tragic conclusion that leaves no one unscathed. The coda to the film, a nasty little stinger in the tail, proves in ultraviolent fashion that attempts to control human nature are invariably bound to fail. It's hardly coincidental that the final shot of the bloodbath looks as though it's taking place on a TV screen. As Marshall McLuhan would have it, and *Murder in a Blue World* exemplifies, the medium is the message.

Caudron Films' 2K scan of *Murder in a Blue World* looks fantastic, with vivid colors, lifelike flesh tones, deep uncrushed blacks, and a well-maintained film grain. Audio is available in either English or Spanish LPCM mono. This English track is pretty tinny in its upper registers, with some hiss and other distortions discernible from time to time, but it matches Mitchum and Lyon's line delivery, so it's probably the way to go. On the other hand, the Spanish mix is a lot more robust and really does justice to the funky score from composer Georges Garvarentz.

Extras include an excellent, exhaustive commentary track from *Diabolique Magazine* editor and author Kat Ellinger. She goes into the film's dismissive reception in Spain (where it was referred to as *A Clockwork Tangerine*), the career of Eloy de la Iglesia, whether or not this can be considered a giallo, and the retro-futuristic design of the film. In an interview from 2008, Chris Mitchum claims he was blackballed in Hollywood owing to his association with John Wayne's political views, cites this as his reason for moving to Spain, goes into his subsequent career in Europe and Asia, and describes being aghast at the Thai approach to stunt work. "Dubbing in a Blue World" has dubbing editor Ben Tatar discussing his time as Ava Gardner's personal secretary, working with producer Sidney Pink, dubbing numerous Paul Naschy titles, doing the literal "grunt work" on erotic films, and his thoughts on *Murder in a Blue World* itself. Dr. Xavier Aldana Reyes contributes an intriguing, if at times overly academic, video essay analysis of the film, its director, and their place in Spanish cinema.

Budd Wilkins