

## ASIAN INVASION

### ARROW VIDEO

(\$39.95 Blu-ray + DVD 2-disc set) 6/15

### THE HAPPINESS OF THE KATAKURIS (2001) 88 1/2

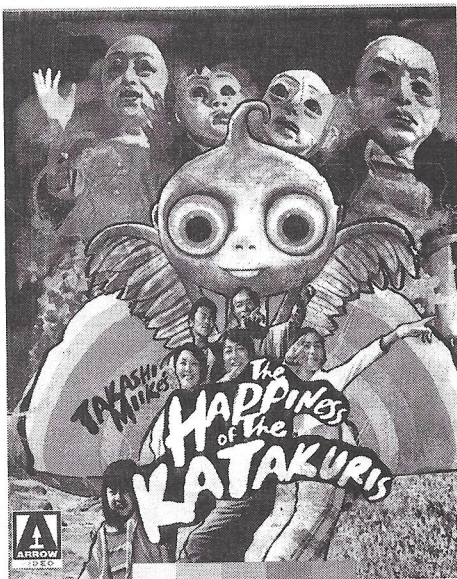
D: Takashi Miike. Kenji Sawada, Keiko Matsuzaka, Shinji Takeda, Naomi Nishida, Kiyoshiro Imawano. 113 mins.

Laid-off shoe salesman Sawada convinces his fractious family to open a guest house in a remote area, believing a major highway is soon to be built nearby. But his hopes of familial unity in an idyllic mountain location prove difficult to achieve. Guests are few and far between, and they keep dying in grotesque ways. Sawada and family bury the bodies, hoping to prevent their establishment from getting a poor reputation, but things just go from bad to worse. If this summary sounds coherent, then it is misleading. I should add that Miike's film is also a musical, periodically shifts into claymation for the more elaborate FX scenes (including a volcanic eruption), and opens with a soup-birthered gremlin ripping out a woman's uvula (more claymation) in a scene that has nothing to do with the rest of the film. On paper, this is a recipe for non-stop zaniness and is certainly more evidence, as if any were needed, that Miike is not a director to be slotted into a single genre. But the end result is not always successful. The performances are extremely broad, and the humor is pie-in-the-face amped up to 11 (constantly). There is very little variation in tone and the effect is a bit wearying. And for all that, there is much here that is very inventive, 113 minutes is too long even for this much lunacy. The pace often feels slack. Still, there is definitely nothing run-of-the-mill about the film, and if it doesn't fully succeed, there aren't too many mash-ups of H.P. Lovecraft and **The Sound of Music** out there, so it does warrant a look. Special features include two commentary tracks (one by Miike) and a featurette about the animation. 8

—David Annandale

### ASIAN UPDATE

Well Go USA showcases an older, more subdued Jackie Chan as a kidnapped cop in **Police Story: Lockdown**. The same label intros the fantasy adventure **Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal**, complete with making-of featurette and trailer, **Wolf Warrior**, starring Wu Jing and Scott Adkins, and **Z Storm** (Blu-ray \$29.98, DVD \$24.98 each), arriving with bonus interviews, making-of featurettes, and trailers. Mark Chao toplines in Tsai Yuen-Hsun's **Black & White: The Dawn of Assault**, out from Shout! Factory (Blu-ray \$19.97).



### PHANTOM PHEEDBACK

(continued from page 6)

#### STEWING OVER STEWART

To the Editor:

In reading Nancy Naglin's insightful "Reeling Back" essay on **The Flight of the Phoenix**, a passing remark brought me up short. In fact, you might say I'm reeling back in surprise. "Jimmy Stewart:" she writes, "he's either the greatest actor or the biggest phony. I side with the detractors." She and I must travel in different social circles, because I've never met any of these detractors she mentions, only admirers. And I've certainly never come across a film fan or a critic so mean-spirited as to call Mr. Stewart "a phony." I was curious to discover what she had against this actor's work but, curiously, and much to my frustration, she had nothing but words of praise for "one of his finest performances" in **Flight**. True, she couldn't resist mentioning that she considers only one other Stewart portrayal to meet that standard (his small-town lawyer in **Anatomy of a Murder**), which bespeaks an open mind on her part. But otherwise, she drops only a hint—"sappy tendencies"—as to what she deplores in the rest of the roles in Stewart's resume, leaving me to wonder what faults she (and her fellow "detractors") have found in all of his other classic movie appearances. (And, oh yes, also performances in classic plays. I treasure the memory of seeing him on Broadway opposite Helen Hayes in **Harvey**.) Perhaps in some future column Ms. Naglin can elaborate on her perceptions of Mr. Stewart's shortcomings.

—Preston Neal Jones, Hollywood, CA

*Nancy Naglin replies: Stewart's rube comedy and "aw shucks" mannerisms—the trademark stammer, word repetition, studied pauses—may certainly please his many fans and work for certain roles but, for detractors like me, too often undermine serious and action roles (The Far Country, for example; Joel McCrea might have been a better pick) and, unchecked, can grate like chalk on a blackboard.*

Dear Phantom,

Whoa! Okay, you sold me, I will have to see **Dolls**. Why are dolls so darn scary? When you said it is an adult fairy-tale with gory things happening to bad people, you had me at "gory." Your latest issue was absolutely fascinating! **Black Sea** was an "okay" movie; I got tired of watching all of those guys in cramped quarters. **Dracula Untold** was an awesome movie and the special effects were top-notch. I don't understand why various people gave this movie a bad review. **A Most Violent Year**—the reviewer is on the mark. This had to be the most boring movie ever. **Taken 3**—what can I say? Liam Neeson is a man of action, love his movies. I enjoyed your write-up on Pam Grier's **Coffy** and Roger Moore in **The Saint**. **Timerider** was one of my favorite time-traveling movies!

—Paul Dale Roberts, via e-mail

*Thanks for checking in. Dan Cziraky looks at another take on the Dracula mythos, **Tales of Dracula** (page 12). Meantime, Liam Neeson returns to drink, fight and rack up an impressive body count in **Run All Night** (Warner).*

Dear Phantom,

Great work on the magazine, have been following for 4 or 5 years and anticipate each new issue! Just finished watching Alan Parker's **Shoot the Moon** (1982) and spotted Robert Costanzo as attorney for Albert Finney, Leo Spinelli. Fine film! IMDB is currently showing 270 credits for this I-know-that-face actor. I would love to hear his story and am sure many other **VideoScope** fans would too. If I missed him in a previous issue, please let me know which.

—Mike in Toronto, via e-mail

*The otherwise ubiquitous Robert Costanzo has yet to put in an appearance in our pages. 'Scope scribe Scott Voisin hopes to chat with the busy thesp for a future Character Kings interview.*

Phantom,

You sure dig them oaters, don'tch'all. Bet you've seen **The Spikes Gang**, **Billy Two Hats** and **Shalako**. And **Frenchie King**.

—Hugh Shelton, Warren, MI

*Seen'em all and highly recommend **Billy Two Hats**, just out in a new Blu-ray via Kino.*

Dear Phantom,

Love the new issue; am going through it the second and third time. Very good when I get a book tip on top of movies to see. A thick issue. Thank you and the team for all your hard work.

—John Huff, via e-mail

*Send your comments and queries to:*

**Phantom Pheedback**  
PhanMedia, L.L.C.  
PO Box 216  
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756  
Or e-mail: phanmedia@aol.com

