

Blu-Ray Round Up: Jet Li, Jackie Chan Highlight ‘Ultimate Force of Four’

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CHICAGO – Attention martial arts fans, Buena Vista Home Video recently released a wave of martial arts films on Blu-Ray under the title “The Ultimate Force of Four” box set, including one of Jet Li’s best films, the spectacular “Hero,” from director Zhang Yimou. “Hero” is easily the highlight of the quartet of recent HD releases but “Iron Monkey,” “The Legend of Drunken Master,” and “Zatoichi” will all satisfy fans in 1080p (as long as they’re not purists about audio tracks).

Three of the four titles are merely HD imports of special features and films already available on standard DVD. The exception is “Hero,” which includes an all-new featurette and a digital copy, but is actually one of the most divisive Blu-Rays of the year. Miramax/Buena Vista has made the baffling choice to include a higher caliber quality of audio for the dubbed tracks on “Hero,” “Iron Monkey,” and “Zatoichi” than the original language tracks.

It’s a shocking and shameful choice. “Monkey” and “Zatoichi” haven’t stirred up as much controversy as “Hero,” mostly due to that film’s higher level of popularity, but any good movie fan will tell you that the original language track should be presented in at LEAST the same level of quality as the dub, arguably better quality to encourage more viewers to watch these films the way they were intended.

With the exception of “Hero,” the other three titles are a missed opportunity to include a new special feature on any of the releases, but not at all surprising. As the Blu-Ray revolution picks up steam, more and more films are merely being ported to Blu-Ray. It’s up to you to decide if they’re worth the upgrade. Synopsis, tech details, and special features follow.

“Hero”



Synopsis: “This visually stunning cinematic masterpiece gives you the definitive Blu-Ray High Definition experience with its spectacular picture and theater-quality sound. Master filmmaker Quentin Tarantino presents “Hero” - starring martial arts legend Jet Li as a fearless warrior who rises up to defy an empire and unite a nation. With supernatural skill - and no fear - a nameless soldier (Jet Li) embarks on a mission of revenge against the fearsome army that massacred his people. Acclaimed by critics and honored with numerous awards, Hero was an Oscar and Golden Globe nominee.”

"Hero" stars Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Zhang Ziyi, Chen Dao Ming, and Donnie Yen. It was written by Li Feng, Zhang Yimou, & Wang Bin and directed by Yimou. The film is presented in 1080p High Definition with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio and accompanied by an English 5.1 DTS-HD track and Chinese, French, and Spanish 5.1 Dolby Digital. Yes, the English dub track is higher quality than the original language of the film. It's a ridiculous, indefensible decision.

Special features on "Hero" include the new "Close-Up of a Fight Scene," "Inside the Action: A Conversation with Quentin Tarantino & Jet Li," "Hero Defined - Making-Of Featurette," "Storyboard," "Soundtrack Spot," and a digital copy of the film.

"Iron Monkey"



Photo credit: Miramax

Synopsis: "With sensational, nonstop martial arts excitement supplied by the acclaimed choreographer of The Matrix and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Iron Monkey is the spirited tale of a mysterious and mythical Chinese legend - now with pristine picture and theater-quality sound on Blu-Ray Disc. In a desperate and unjust land, where government corruption rules the day, only one man - known as the Iron Monkey - has the courage to challenge the system and fight back. Under the shadow of night, in the silence before dawn, he fights to give hope to the poor and the oppressed. Although no one knows his name or where he comes from, his heroism makes him a living legend to the people - and a wanted man to the powers that be. Presented by Quentin Tarantino - it's the exhilarating action adventure critics everywhere have called one of the greatest martial arts films of all time."

"Iron Monkey" stars Yu Rong Guang, Donnie Yen, Jean Wang, and Tsang Sze Man. It was written by Tsui Hark, Elsa Tang, & Lau Tai Mok and directed by Yuen Wo Ping. The film is presented in 1080p High Definition with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio and accompanied by an English 5.1 DTS-HD track, Chinese 5.1 Dolby Digital track, and a Spanish 2.0 Dolby Digital track.

Special features on "Iron Monkey" include an interview with Quentin Tarantino and an interview with Donnie Yen.

"The Legend of Drunken Master"



Photo credit: Miramax

Synopsis: "The action legend himself - Jackie Chan - explodes across the screen on Blu-Ray Disc in a power-packed adventure that critics agree captures some of the most incredible action stunts ever. When the British government is discovered smuggling precious Chinese artifacts out of the country, folklore hero Wong Fei Hung (Chan) uses his uniquely outlandish style of martial arts - Drunken Boxing - to fight the conspirators and salvage the valuables before it's too late. And the more Hung drinks, the more agile he becomes - able to fend off numerous attacks with unbelievable moves. With Chinese treasures and family pride on the line, Hung, steps up to every challenge. It's a fun

and unstoppably entertaining hit in Blu-Ray High Definition.”

“The Legend of Drunken Master” stars Jackie Chan, Anita Mui, Ti Lung, Lau Ka Leung, and Andy Lau. It was written by Edward Tang, Tong Man Wing, & Yuen Chieh Chi and directed by Lau Ka Leung. The film is presented in 1080p High Definition with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio and accompanied by an English 5.1 DTS-HD track, French 5.1 Dolby Digital track, and a Spanish 2.0 Dolby Digital track.

Special features on “The Legend of Drunken Master” includes “Behind the Master: An Interview with Jackie Chan”.

“The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi”



Synopsis: “Inventive and bold, this film shines with pristine picture and theater-quality sound on Blu-Ray Disc. In an empire ruled by fear, the people’s only hope is the ultimate weapon: Zatoichi (Takeshi Kitano) - a blind, nomadic samurai whose sword has made him a hero and whose courage has made him a legend. Determined to help the desperate residents of a village, Zatoichi seeks justice through revenge. It’s a wildly entertaining film that’s even more brilliant in Blu-Ray High Definition.”

“The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi” stars Beat Takeshi, Tadanobu Asano, Michiyo Ogusu, Yui Natsukawa, Guadalcanal Taka, Daigoro Tachibana, Yuko Daike, Ittoku Kishibe, Saburo Ishikura, and Akira Emoto. It was written and directed by Takeshi Kitano. The film is presented in 1080p High Definition with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio and accompanied by an English 5.1 DTS-HD track, Japanese 5.1 Dolby Digital, and Spanish 2.0 Dolby Digital track.

Special features on “Zatoichi” includes “Behind-the-Scenes Special” and “Exclusive Interviews With Crew”.



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