

Jade Warrior triumphs



Jade Warrior is Finland's first martial arts movie and Director AJ Annila's and Director of Photography Henri Blomberg's feature debut. "The totally new combination of Kung Fu action and Finnish folklore has fascinated me since AJ started working on the script full time after her graduation from film school in 2002. I felt it would be the perfect way to match classical storytelling with wuxia action and technically demanding shots" says Blomberg, a fellow graduate.

This visually stunning love story is inspired by Finnish Kalevala legends and ancient Chinese mythology and is set in Iron Age China and modern day Finland. It tells of Sintai, Kalevala's greatest hero, and his desperate love affair that transcends 7,000 years and 4,000 miles.

"I didn't want **Jade Warrior** to look like an American or Chinese action movie," states Annila. "It needed to be a European drama with an action twist and added Finnish spices; very intimate, but at the same time brave; and a combination of strong action-fantasy visuals with moody shots of a lonely man. Working with Henri at film school, I knew he would keep the action sequence lighting as simple as possible between set-ups and spend his time building moods into important dramatic sequences. With over 20 set-ups each day of the 51 day shoot, it was important he didn't go for wide lenses or miss angles."

"Gaffer Antti Lahtinen and I studied numerous stills and movie clips in pre-

production to 'calibrate' our eyes and ensure we shared the same vision," states Blomberg who dramatically altered the style of lighting between eras. "Ancient China is softly and simply lit, while modern Finland has more contrast and is darker. In action/fantasy genre, an artificial look and lighting are quite usual, but I used natural light and naturally motivated lighting moods and retained some rough visual elements so it wouldn't look over lit."

Shooting in a "controlled, semi documentary style", Blomberg chose 16mm 1:2.35 aspect ratio and ARRI spherical lenses. Kodak VISION2 100T 7212 was his primary stock, while Kodak VISION2 200T 7217 was used for night shoots and low light situations. "I was concerned that the cropped widescreen image from the 16mm original would turn out too soft and blurry, but it was very pleasing. The VISION2 stocks have amazingly little grain and with 7212 it's almost invisible. I love the look it gives: pleasing shadows, great contrast and rich blacks."

"The scene of Sintai fighting the woman he loves has a very classic Chinese mood and, because it looks more like dancing, we covered it from many angles and created a dance-like rhythm in editing," explains Blomberg. "The night scene where Kai, the main modern character, is tossed around by mystery man Berg in a forest has a very different mood; it is almost like a dream sequence with no camera movements, soft dimmed

top light, lots of shadows, slo-mo action and odd framing."

Sintai's fight with a village merchant takes place in bright sunlight on a hillside set. Blomberg explains: "There were holes everywhere and big Chinese-style windows on each wall, so we blocked the sun-side wall with heavy silk cloths and positioned two 12kWs to give us control over the sun's movement; we used three 4kWs as fill light on the opposite side. Black nets on windows and holes helped reduce light levels and villager extras blocked out problematic areas. We tried to keep the camera at eye level and used mirrors to light background areas outside the set to prevent unpleasant shadows in frame." Blomberg used 1000w to 10kW Parcans and Kino Flos, operated mainly on a dimmer board for studio shots, and 1.2kW to 12kW Airstars and Kino Flos on night sets.

"**Jade Warrior** began as an independent/film school project five years ago and is now a dream come true," remarks Annila. "We've created a sense of one story and a film with a difference: a Finnish approach to action fantasy."

Jade Warrior will be distributed in Scandinavia, China and Europe following its release in Finland at the end of 2006. Rezo Film is handling the world sales. ■

Above: Actor Zhang Jing Chu (Ping Yu) in a scene from *Jade Warrior* shot by DP Henri Blomberg (inset).

Below: Actors Tommi Eronen (Sintai Seng Pu) and Zhang Jing Chu (Ping Yu) in a fighting scene from the film.

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