

---

# The Forbidden Kingdom

Peter Trinh;;ptrinh@imprint.uwaterloo.ca

This is it, folks: the movie that all kung fu film fanatics have been waiting for. It's the film world's response to the big question, "Who would win in a fight? Jackie Chan or Jet Li?" Rob Minkoff has approached this question with elegant grace, making this film (starring both Chan and Li) for me an action classic, although at first I was worried. The film's premise initially has the same vibe from film synopses such as *Warriors of Virtue* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Turtles in Time*, so it sounded like the once-dubbed "J&J Project" would be an instant failure.

The story revolves around Jason — played by Michael Angarano from the Disney film *Sky High* — a teenager from Boston with a huge fascination for kung fu films. He stumbles upon a staff belonging to the Monkey King, an ancient Chinese immortal who was cast and imprisoned in stone by an evil warlord. It brings Jason back in time, where he meets up with a group of people searching for the same staff Jason has to free the Monkey King.

While the premise may seem like a horrible idea, it's executed really well. For one, Minkoff doesn't shy away from the violence at all. As a PG-13 film, it has the best of Yuen Woo-Ping's martial-arts direction, complete with smooth movements and brutal kills. Unless they're already into big martial arts films, you might want to keep the kids away from this one.

The story itself plays very well, although it's your typical "epic quest." The characters make up the meat of the film, however. Jackie Chan plays a master of the Drunken Arts, Jet Li plays both the travelling monk and the Monkey King, and new-to-America actress Yifei Liu plays Golden Sparrow, a musician with throwing knives and a habit of referring to herself in the third person. Add Jason, who unlike Ralph Macchio from *The Karate Kid*, actually learns how to fight against hundreds of soldiers, and you've got yourself a hardcore list of fighters. As well, the atmosphere is captured beautifully with great wide-angle shots, CGI-rendered landscapes, and well-orchestrated music and sound effects that just bleed with classic kung fu film quality.

For fans of great action scenes and classic references to "Tiger Stance" kung fu, I definitely recommend giving this film a shot.