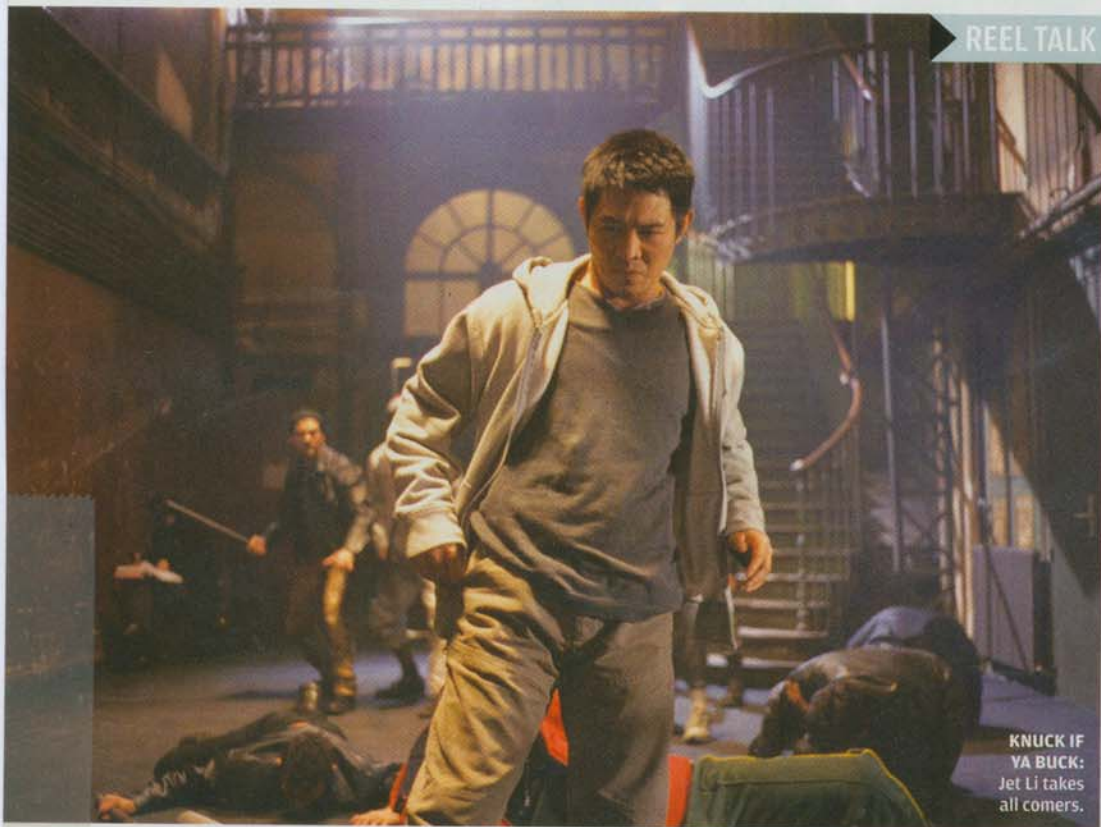


Off the Chain

Martial arts champ-turned-actor **JET LI**, 42, teams up with Morgan Freeman for another round of mortal combat in this month's *Unleashed*. Protect ya neck!



REEL TALK

In *Unleashed*, you play Danny, a prizefighter who's treated like a slave, wears a metal collar, and fights for food. What attracted you to the role?

Usually, I'm the tough guy, but I'd never played this kind of character. Physically, Danny is very strong, but mentally, he's 10 years old. He doesn't understand human life or know about friendship, family, or compassion. He's just like a vile dog. A lot of people say, "Hey, Jet Li, you can kick ass." But I wanted to show that just because you're physically strong doesn't mean you're a good guy.

In the film, Danny uses force to collect debts and take care of enemies. How do you deal with people who owe you money?

[Laughs] I get my lawyer and sue them to get the money back.

So you would never even consider taking matters into your own hands?

No. Beating up people in real life is the worst thing. I've never fought with anyone in my life...since making movies [laughs].

KNUCK IF YA BUCK:
Jet Li takes all comers.

ONE KICK-ASS TALE

Don't sleep on the beast from the East.

PEEP THIS

Once upon a time in China (aight, so it was 1991), and long before he popped up Stateside in *Lethal Weapon 4*, Jet Li became the biggest movie badass

in the land of a billion, thanks to one action-packed flick, *Once Upon a Time in China*. A must-own for anyone who's ever banged Genius/GZA's *Liquid Swords*, this movie is packed with the kind of amazing action sequences that made Jackie Chan an international star, but without all the goofiness. So what if the plot is as clear as a glass of milk? The story line will be the last thing on your mind as you watch Li—a former world champion Wu-Shu martial artist—use a single umbrella to thwart a dozen gangsters, shield himself from an attack of scalding water, and then float down from a three-story building. Though Li starred in only the first four, the film spawned a six-title franchise. With that much evidence on video store shelves, Mel Gibson and Danny Glover should have seen him coming.

Joe Anclien



You worked with Aaliyah in *Romeo Must Die*. How did the news of her death affect you?

I felt like I lost a family member. *Romeo Must Die* was my first starring role in the U.S., and everyone was like a family working on that movie, so we loved her. I remember she got me some nice Gucci pants for her video "Try Again." Every time I wear them, I remember her and keep her in my heart.

DMX was also in that film. How was it working with him?

He's in his own world. He's like a little boy. When he's happy, he comes to the set, and when he's not, he doesn't care [laughs]. It was good for me, because I need to learn how to be patient and understand how people think.

You were originally slated to be the lead actor in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Do you regret passing on that film?

No. My wife was pregnant that year, and I promised her 10 years ago that if she got pregnant, I'd stop working. I had to keep my promise, so I quit the movie and stopped working until the baby came. Family is very important to me. I've made 34 movies, but I can't make 34 babies.

Is there anyone that you're afraid of?

I'm never scared of people, because your biggest enemy is yourself.

Toshitaka Kondo