

= The Killer (1989 film) =

The Killer (simplified Chinese : 喋血街頭 ; traditional Chinese : 喋血街頭 ; Jyutping : dip6 hyut3 soeng1 hung4 ; pinyin : Diéxuè shu?ngxióng) ? is a 1989 Hong Kong action film written and directed by John Woo , and starring Chow Yun Fat , Danny Lee and Sally Yeh . Chow plays the assassin Ah Jong , who accidentally damages the eyes of the singer Jennie (Sally Yeh) during a shootout . He later discovers that if Jennie does not have an expensive operation she will go blind . To get the money for Jennie , Ah Jong decides to perform one last hit .

After the financial backing from Tsui Hark became problematic following the release of Woo 's film A Better Tomorrow 2 , Woo had to find backing through Chow Yun Fat and Danny Lee 's financing companies . Woo went into filming The Killer with a rough draft whose plot was influenced by the films Le Samouraï , Mean Streets , and Narazumono . Woo desired to make a film about honour , friendship and the relationship of two seemingly opposite people . After finishing filming , Woo referred to The Killer as a tribute to directors Jean Pierre Melville and Martin Scorsese .

The Killer was not an immediate success in Hong Kong , but received critical acclaim in the Western world with reviewers praising the action scenes and its over the top style . The film became Woo 's stepping stone to make Hollywood films and has been a strong influence on many directors , including Quentin Tarantino , Robert Rodriguez and Johnnie To .

= = Plot = =

A Hong Kong assassin , Ah Jong , is on his last job for the Triad (a criminal organization) , but accidentally damages the eyes of a young nightclub singer named Jennie with a muzzle flash in a shootout . After the attack , Ah Jong begins to watch Jennie perform at the nightclub and escorts her home when she is attacked by thugs . Jennie and Ah Jong begin to fall in love during his frequent visits at her apartment . Driven to help her secure the money for a sight saving corneal transplant , he accepts one final hit . A police detective , Li Ying , spots Ah Jong completing the job but the assassin escapes . The Triad leader Hay Wong Hoi double crosses Ah Jong , and instead of paying him , sends a group of hitmen to kill him . During Ah Jong 's escape from the Triad , a young child is injured by a stray bullet . After dispatching the attackers , Ah Jong rushes the child to the hospital while being followed by Li and his partner Sgt. Tsang . Once the child regains consciousness at the casualty ward , Ah Jong escapes Li and Tsang .

Li becomes obsessed with Ah Jong 's act of good will . He and Tsang find that Ah Jong visits Jennie at her apartment ; they plan to arrest him the next time he visits her . Ah Jong visits Jennie and is caught in an ambush from which he manages to escape . Li and Tsang explain to Jennie that Ah Jong was the assassin that blinded her at the nightclub . Ah Jong meets with his Triad manager , Fung Sei (Chu Kong) , and demands his payment for the job . Fung Sei brings a suitcase for Ah Jong , who discovers it to be filled with sheets of blank paper before finding himself in the middle of a Triad ambush . He kills all of the hitmen , but leaves Fung Sei alive . The next day , after Fung Sei 's pleas for Wong Hoi fall on deaf ears , Ah Jong does a hit and run on Wong Hoi 's car , wounding the Triad leader and killing his driver and bodyguard .

Li begins to close in on Ah Jong after Tsang follows Fung Sei ; Tsang is killed after revealing the location of his home . Because of their friendship , Fung Sei leaves a large stockpile of weaponry for Ah Jong . The home is another ambush ; Li attacks , followed by a group of Triad hitmen . Li gets caught in the middle of the crossfire between Ah Jong and the Triad . Ah Jong and Li flee , and while Ah Jong 's wounds are mended , they find themselves bonding and becoming friends . Ah Jong tells Li that should anything happen to him , Li should have Ah Jong 's eyes donated for Jennie 's surgery or use Ah Jong 's money to fly her overseas to have her surgery performed by more experienced doctors . Li , Ah Jong , and Jennie wait in a church for Fung Sei to return with Ah Jong 's money . Fung Sei arrives with the money , horribly beaten by Wong Hoi 's gangsters who have followed him . He is mortally wounded when the hitmen barge into the church . After Ah Jong ends Fung Sei 's misery , he and Li engage in a long and bloody shootout with the Triad all over the church . The battle ends with a Mexican standoff between Ah Jong , Li and Wong Hoi . Ah Jong

manages to wound Wong Hoi , but the Triad leader lands two bullets in Ah Jong 's eyes before the latter dies of his wounds . When a police squadron arrives in the scene , Wong Hoi begs to be taken into custody . Frustrated by the outcome of the battle , Li fatally shoots Wong Hoi and mourns Ah Jong just as the police surround him .

The credits roll with Ah Jong playing the harmonica .

= = Cast = =

Chow Yun @-@ fat as Ah Jong (?? ? Zhu?ng , aa3 zong1) , an assassin who accidentally blinds singer Jennie when he is on a mission for the criminal organization , the Triads . Ah Jong decides to take on one last mission to pay for surgery to repair her eyes . Ah Jong is called John and Jeff in some subtitled prints of the film . The nickname given to Ah Jong by Li is " Har Tau " , which roughly translates as " Shrimp Head . " In some dubbed and subtitled prints , his nickname is " Mickey Mouse " or " Butthead " .

Danny Lee as Detective Li Ying (? ? , L? Y?ng , lei5 jing1) . Li works with his partner Tsang to find Ah Jong . After his first meeting with him , Li becomes obsessed with Ah Jong 's morals and character . The nickname given to Li by Ah Jong is " Ah B " which roughly translates to baby or kid . In some dubbed and subtitled prints , his nickname is " Dumbo " or " Numbnuts " .

Sally Yeh as Jennie (?? Zh?nn? , zan1 nei4) , a nightclub singer who is blinded by Ah Jong in a shootout . Jennie falls in love with Ah Jong , before learning of his profession as a killer .

Kenneth Tsang as Sgt. Tsang Yeh , Li 's police partner . Tsang helps find the whereabouts of Fung Sei which will lead Li to Ah Jong . In some subtitled prints , his name is Randy Chang .

Chu Kong as Fung Sei , Ah Jong 's Triad manager and close friend . After Ah Jong is spotted on a hit , Fung Sei is ordered to kill Ah Jong . In some subtitled prints , his name is " Sidney Fong . "

Shing Fui @-@ on as Hay Wong Hoi (? ? W?ng H?i , wong1 hoi2) , a ruthless Triad boss . In some subtitled versions he is " Johnny Weng . "

Ricky Yi Fan @-@ wai as Frank Chen , a contract killer / assassin hired by Wong Hoi to kill Ah Jong .

= = Themes = =

Director John Woo has described The Killer as being about " honour and friendship " , " trying to find out if there is something common between two people " and as a " romantic poem " . The structure of the film follows two men on opposite sides of the law who find a relation to each other in their opposition to a greater evil , Wong Hoi , a Triad boss . Li and Ah Jong 's relationship was influenced by the Spy vs. Spy comics from Mad Magazine . Woo recalled " When I was young I was fascinated with the cartoon ? I love it very much ... the white bird and the black bird are always against each other , but deep in their heart , they are still friendly , and the idea came from that . " Woo uses Ah Jong and Li as a central motif to illustrate moral points . Scenes with this reflective doubling include the hospital sequence with Li and Ah Jong on opposite sides of a hospital hall and in the final battle scene where Li and Ah Jong are in a standoff with Wong . The focus on male friendships in Woo 's film have been interpreted as homoerotic . Woo has responded to these statements stating " People will bring their own preconceptions to a movie If they see something in The Killer that they consider to be homoerotic then that is their privilege . It 's certainly not intentional . "

Woo is a Christian and instills his films with religious imagery while stating that The Killer is " not a religious film " . In the opening of The Killer , Ah Jong is found in a church stating he enjoys the " tranquility " . Ah Jong is later found in the church again getting several slugs pulled out of his back showing his intense pain while the altar and cross are shown prominently behind him . The idea was influenced by Martin Scorsese 's film Mean Streets , Woo stated the imagery was used to show that " God is welcoming , no matter if it 's a good or a bad man , everyone is welcome " .

Woo draws on animal symbolism throughout the film . He filled the church with doves and pigeons , employing doves to represent the spirits of the people . This was the first film where Woo used the

dove symbolism and he has used it to similar effect in *Hard Target* and *Face / Off* . A cat appears when Ah Jong first meets Jennie on her visit home , and secondarily when Li 's partner Chang tries to catch Ah Jong in Jennie 's apartment . In Chinese culture , a cat coming into a home is an omen of ruin and poverty for its inhabitants . Both Chang and Jennie meet negative outcomes in the film .

= = Production = =

= = = Pre @-@ production = = =

The Killer was director Woo 's follow @-@ up to *A Better Tomorrow 2* which was released in 1987 . The first cut of *A Better Tomorrow 2* was too long for the studio so the film was edited within a week separately by both producer Tsui Hark and Woo . According to producer Terence Chang , Tsui Hark felt that John Woo ruined *A Better Tomorrow 2* and asked Chang to fire Woo from the studio . When Chang refused , Hark began rejecting Woo 's new film ideas , including ideas for films that would later be made , such as *Bullet in the Head* and *Once a Thief* . When Woo proposed the story of *The Killer* to Tsui Hark , it was denied ; Hark 's reaction was that " [n] obody wants to see a film about a killer " .

The Killer was not able to be filmed until actor Chow Yun @-@ fat stepped in and enlisted the company he was contracted with , Golden Princess Film , to fund part of the project . Chow had worked previously with Woo on the two *A Better Tomorrow* films . Woo wanted Danny Lee to play Li Ying , but Lee was under an exclusive contract with Cinema City and was only able to work on *The Killer* if his production company , Magnum , was involved . John Woo approached his friend , Sally Yeh , asking her to be in a film to play an important female character . Yeh was currently contracted with Tsui Hark and accepted the role but later felt she did not give her best performance . The supporting roles were filled out by friends of the actors and director . Chu Kong was a friend of Chow Yun @-@ fat who had entered retirement and returned to acting in *The Killer* as a favor . Two of Woo 's close friends joined the cast : actor Kenneth Tsang and screenwriter Barry Wong . Wong Wing @-@ Hang was hired to be the director of photography for *The Killer* but had to leave the set for an extended period of time , so Peter Pau was added to shoot the rest of the film .

= = = Filming = = =

Woo had over 90 days to shoot *The Killer* which was nearly double the amount of time that the average Hong Kong film was shot in the late 1980s . Woo went into filming with only a short treatment for the film and wrote the details of the script while filming . During promotion periods for the film , Woo described the film as a tribute to Martin Scorsese and French director Jean @-@ Pierre Melville . Woo cites Melville 's *Le Samouraï* as an influence on the story . Woo borrows plot elements for the film , including the set @-@ up where Jef enters a nightclub and looks at the female singer . Woo also described the influence of a Japanese film , *Narazumono* , about a killer (Ken Takakura) who only kills delinquents . When a mob tricks him into killing an innocent person , he swears revenge but then meets a woman who has tuberculosis and wants to go home . The killer promises the woman that he will take her home after getting his revenge .

The scene where Danny Lee chases a gunman onto a tram was filmed in Causeway Bay and the crew only had three hours to film . Residents thought it was a real gunfight and phoned the police . However , when the police arrived , Danny Lee talked to the superintendent so they could continue filming . Scenes from the Dragon Boat festival were shot months apart , some footage was of the boat races and rest of the footage involving the actors was shot months later . It was planned for the boats to flip over during the chase but the owners refused because they felt it would bring bad luck . The scene at the airport were filmed at the Kai Tak Airport . The scenes at Paul Chu Kong 's character 's house were filmed in Stanley , Hong Kong . John Woo wanted this house to be by a beach but a suitable location could not be found . The action scene inside the house took 28 days to shoot . The final action scene took 36 days to shoot and was shot at a remote building made to look

like a church while the exterior seen from Ah Jong 's apartment is a real church . The original ending of the film involved Jennie waiting at an airport for Li to give her the money and for them to travel to the United States . Due to Sally Yeh 's tight filming schedule , the scene was not filmed and replaced with Ah Jong playing the harmonica .

= = = Music = = =

Tsui and Woo disagreed on the musical aspects of the film . For the opening scene , Woo wanted the singer to perform a jazz song and have the killer playing a saxophone . Tsui rejected this idea as he felt that the Hong Kong audiences did not understand or like jazz . Woo stated that he " had to change it to a Chinese song , the kind of song they always use in Hong Kong movies . " Actress Sally Yeh who performed the Cantopop songs did not feel they were appropriate for the film . The songs were requested by the studio and written specifically for The Killer .

The film 's music was composed by Lowell Lo and edited by David Wu . A reoccurring musical theme is a haunting vibraphone theme which is first heard over the opening credits . The harmonica motif in the film was influenced by the soundtracks of Ennio Morricone , specifically the soundtrack to Once Upon a Time in America , and used a bottle blower to give the music a haunting effect . David Wu said the influence of the Harmonica music in Sergio Leone 's western films was a strong influence on his work . During the final action scene when the statue of the Virgin Mary is destroyed , the action music transitions to " Overture " from Messiah by George Frideric Handel . This was the idea of editor David Wu who felt that it would break up the numbing effect of the kinetic violence .

= = Release = =

The Killer was first released in Taiwan in March 1989 with a running time of 124 minutes . It was then cut to its current running time of 110 minutes and released in Hong Kong during July 1989 , Woo felt this cut was " much better " . The film was not an immediate success in Hong Kong due to the Tiananmen Square massacre but eventually gained fame , grossing \$ 18 @, @ 255 @, @ 083 and reached ninth at the 1989 Hong Kong box office . At the 9th Hong Kong Film Awards , the film won for Best Director (John Woo) and Best Editing (Fan Kung Ming) and was also nominated for Best Picture , Best Supporting Actor (Paul Chu Kong) , Best Screenplay (Woo) and Best Cinematography (Wong Wing Hang and Peter Pau) . The Killer was popular in Korea taking seventh highest place in the year end box office receipts .

The Killer was shown at several film festivals outside Asia including the 1989 Toronto Film Festival and , during the film 's United States premiere , at the Palm Springs International Film Festival in January 1990 . It was also shown at the Sundance Film Festival in the United States and the Cannes Film Festival in France in 1990 . Film producer Terence Chang suggested that The Killer 's success around the world made several Hong Kong filmmakers jealous : " It created a certain kind of resentment in the Hong Kong film industry . One thing I can say for sure is , the American , European , Japanese , Korean and even the Taiwanese audiences and critics appreciated The Killer a lot more than it was in Hong Kong . " The Killer received a wide release in the United Kingdom on 8 October 1993 .

= = = Home media = = =

The Killer was released in the United States on VHS by Fox Lorber in November 1992 , in a dubbed and subtitled version . On 25 June 1996 Fox Lorber released The Killer along with Hard Boiled as a double feature on home video . The Killer was released on DVD by The Criterion Collection on 1 April 1998 in the original Cantonese language track with English subtitles . Bonus features on DVD included the trailer , production notes , and a commentary track . Woo was very happy with the film being included in the Criterion Collection stating , " it was great because it would let people know what [The Killer and Hard Boiled] are about ... when I saw that Criterion Collection selected The Killer , I was very happy as The Killer and Bullet in the Head are my two favourites " .

On 3 Oct 2000 Fox Lorber released a DVD of The Killer with English and Cantonese audio , including a commentary track with John Woo and film trailers . This Fox Lorber disc was also included in a two disc DVD collection with Hard Boiled but both the Fox Lorber and Criterion DVDs went out of print .

On 30 March 2010 The Killer was released by the Dragon Dynasty label on two @-@ disc DVD and Blu @-@ ray . Bonus features included were interviews with John Woo , a location guide , and a trailer gallery .

In the United Kingdom , The Killer was released on DVD by Hong Kong Legends on 21 October 2002 which included an audio commentary with Bey Logan and interviews with Kenneth Tsang , Sally Yeh and cinematographer Peter Pau .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical response = = =

The Killer received critical acclaim on its initial release outside Hong Kong with critics focusing their praise on the action scenes in the film . Stephen Holden of The New York Times referred to the film as " Alternately gripping and laughable " and that " The scenes of gore and destruction are even more spectacular than Hong Kong 's fog @-@ shrouded skyline " . Variety gave a positive review , describing the film as an " extremely violent and superbly made actioner demonstrates the tight grasp that director John Woo has on the crime meller genre " . Kathleen Maher of The Austin Chronicle praised the film stating that it " defies all categorization but demands comparisons , if only to prove that there 's never been anything like this before . " Hal Hinson of The Washington Post wrote a positive review , describing the film as " like eating popcorn , but it 's not just any old brand ; it 's escape @-@ velocity popcorn , popcorn with a slurp of rocket fuel ... [Woo 's] ideas overreach themselves with such a virile swagger that they border on comedy . With excess like this you can 't help but laugh . This is a rush of a movie " . The Christian Science Monitor gave the film a mixed review , stating that " This violent Hong Kong thriller has more psychological depth than most of its kind , but ultimately seems like a pointless exercise in style " .

Later critiques of the film remained positive . The Washington Post stated that " the plot doesn 't exactly break new crime @-@ story ground . It 's all the Woo flourishes ... that elevates The Killer to another level " . Lucia Bozzola of the online film database Allmovie gave the film a five star rating , and stated it as " One of the high points of 1980s Hong Kong action cinema " . Empire gave the film five stars and proclaimed that " John Woo 's trademark style reached its zenith in The Killer " . In 2010 , Time Out New York ranked The Killer at number 50 on their list of the top 50 foreign films of all time . As of 2014 , The Killer is one of the several films to maintain a perfect 100 % rating on Rotten Tomatoes . In 2014 , Time Out polled several film critics , directors , actors and stunt actors to list their top action films . The Killer was listed at 24th place on this list .

= = = Legacy = = =

The Killer is an important and influential film for both Western and Asian filmmakers . Film scholars have noted the similarities between Woo 's style and The Killer with the films Nikita (1990) and Léon (1994) directed by French director Luc Besson . Kenneth E. Hall described Léon as having the similar character configuration of a hitman and the person he protects . In Nikita , the main character 's crisis of conscience after performing a number of hits is also seen in The Killer . Lucy Mazdon described the style of Nikita as recalling " the work of directors like John Woo . Like Nikita , Woo 's films show alienated and often brutal characters and graphic violence " . In the United States , directors Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino developed films that were influenced by The Killer . Rodriguez 's films El Mariachi (1992) and Desperado (1995) contain stylistic homages to The Killer . In the film Jackie Brown , Tarantino wrote dialog referencing The Killer . No references to the film are made in the original novel . Asian @-@ based directors were also influenced by the film

. Hong Kong director Johnnie To borrows from The Killer 's gunfighting style , oppositional character pairing , and parody in his films A Hero Never Dies , Running Out of Time , and Fulltime Killer .

The Killer was also influential on hip hop music . American hip hop artist , and Wu @-@ Tang Clan member Raekwon released his critically praised debut album Only Built 4 Cuban Linx ... (1995) that sampled numerous portions of dialog from the film . RZA , the producer of the album described the album 's themes by stating that " Rae and Ghost was two opposite guys as far as neighborhoods was concerned , I used John Woo 's The Killer . [In that movie] you got Chow Yun Fat [playing the role of Ah Jong] and Danny Lee [Inspector Li] . They have to become partners to work shit out . " Woo felt honored that the group sampled The Killer and asked for no monetary return from them . In 2005 , Vibe magazine placed The Killer at number 20 on their list of top fifty films that shaped hip hop .

= = Remake = =

In 1992 , American director and writer Walter Hill wrote a screenplay titled The Killer , Based on the Hong Kong Action Film by John Woo that was dated 6 April 1992 . A year later , screenwriters Jim Cash and Jack Epps , Jr. were hired by producers Charles Roven and Robert Cavallo to write a screenplay based on The Killer for Tri @-@ Star Pictures . The press release of this remake stated the script was written for actors Richard Gere and Denzel Washington . In June 1992 , it was announced Walter Hill and David Giler were writing a script titled Hong Kong based on The Killer with Hill directing . The producers had difficulty with the relationship between two main characters in the script as they felt that American audiences would interpret it as a homoerotic one . Producer Terence Chang , who worked with Woo on several productions , suggested to the American producers to have Hong Kong actress Michelle Yeoh play the role of the police officer to resolve any homoerotic reading of the film . A third draft of the script was released by 23 August 1993 which featured a story of a Caucasian hitman living in Hong Kong . This screenplay moved the focus from the pairing the hit man and the police detective characters to the characters of blinded night club singer and the hit man .

In October 2007 , The Hollywood Reporter announced that a remake of The Killer was announced with American @-@ Korean director John H. Lee directing . The remake would take place in Los Angeles 's Koreatown , Chinatown , and South Central . Lee has stated that The Killer is one of his favourite films and that he is excited to make his own version of the film . Lee 's version was set to be produced by Woo , and star Jung Woo @-@ sung and shot in 3D . Seven Stars Film Studios was slated to finance the production with a screenplay by Josh Campbell . Sarah Li was initially cast to play the role of the blind singer . Woo spoke about the remake in October 2015 , stating that Lee 's film was in development for some time and Lee eventually took on other projects . Woo commented that after completing his film Manhunt , he " probably will go back to Hollywood to make another action thriller . I ? m going to make The Killer in an American version . "