

## Excerpt - King Dragon

The death of Bruce Lee stunned the world, affecting people in nearly every country. Many were unable to accept the fact that this super giant of the screen was capable of disappearance.

Three coroners had been called to investigate, each from a different country. All agreed death had been caused by ingestion of a simple headache remedy containing aspirin and equagesic and that one or the other, or a combination of the two, had been the cause. Nothing else. A combined report issued by the coroners was brief: ACUTE EDEMA, SWELLING OF THE BRAIN....DEATH BY MISADVENTURE. These were words of the report. Unbelievable? Too simple? Perhaps. But quick....without warning....without pain.

The demise of a Hero is never without stories, gossip and rumors. The death of Bruce Lee was no exception. In cities including New York, London, Mexico City, and Hong Kong, as well as Los Angeles, I have heard amazing tales. Many of them worthy of headlines....most of them claiming to have substantial proof. Such stories include Murder by Chinese Mafia...Murder by Japenese Martial Artists&hellip; Poison by Motion Picture Associate. Some who spoke with me have sworn they knew Bruce had not died according to the reported manner. &ldquo;He was killed,&rdquo; they say, &ldquo;in an alley during a fight with a number of hired thugs.&rdquo; This was one of the stories told to me in Hong Kong by a man who claimed to be a friend of an actual witness to the fight. The witness had supposedly watched the battle-to-death from the top of a nearby building.

Then there is the rather exotic claim dealing with an aspect of the &lsquo;delayed palm&rsquo; treatment, where some highly-skilled individual used a certain secret form of acupressure to cause Bruce&rsquo;s death. Although the concept itself is not altogether impossible, it is an assured fact that such occurrence did not take place in causing the death of Bruce Lee.

One story most popular among those living in certain areas of Southeast Asia holds to the belief that Bruce is not really dead. Rather, he is hiding somewhere in the remote jungles of that area. Together with this belief is the theory he will one day return to continue his work. Interesting, yes, but the deadline for fulfillment has come and gone. Bruce died in 1973. The claims were that he would return in two years. Roots for such thinking are not difficult to understand since we know Bruce once made a statement that he would like to complete certain projects and then retire someplace for a ten-year period in order to relax, enjoy his family and build new ideas within his own thinking before possibly changing direction in his work. His feelings at the time were that he might switch from acting and the physical martial arts and move directly into the technical and productive areas of film-making.

In Hong Kong, at the Kowloon Funeral Parlor, thousands upon thousands of fans filled the streets, spilling over into and onto nearby buildings, rooftops, and walls. Hundreds of police, called from everywhere in the city, did their best to maintain order. Efforts were primarily successful, for people had come in sadness and respect. Not frivolity.

Inside the funeral parlor Bruce lay dressed in the same blue suit he had worn in his second major film, Chinese Connection. Around him, stunned in disbelief, were hundreds of acquaintances, friends, business associates....and his family. In front of the flower-laden altar they bowed before a large color photo of The Star. Three joss sticks (funeral incense) along with two tall white candles burned impressions into minds and hearts of those standing in silence in the hot stuffy room. Above, suspended in midair, a banner proclaimed: A Star Disappears into the Sea of Art. At the center of all this rested the open bronze casket. On the right sat Linda dressed in traditional white sackcloth with pointed hood. The children, Brandon and Shannon, wearing similar attire, sat quietly together on cushions all through the long ordeal,

obviously stunned, unable to quite grasp the full tragedy as it unfolded around them. One could sense and almost feel the presence of their father's spirit protectively surrounding them. Next to them sat Grace, Bruce's mother, along with Bruce's brother, Peter, and a close friend. Emotions became nearly unbearable as the band droned out the sorrowful strains of the lament so reminiscent of the opening scene of Chinese Connection, which commemorated the death of Bruce's beloved teacher. Friends as well as others wept openly. In sharp contrast were the three central figures in white, their faces for the moment masked as they sat expressionless and composed. Their stored-up grief would await another place, another time for expression.

Outside in the street a giant canvas portrait of Bruce had been raised between two buildings measuring two stories high. It would remain for some time to remind local residents and all visitors to the city that Hong Kong was proud and grateful for the man they mourned this day.

Following the funeral in Hong Kong the body of Bruce was flown to its last resting place across the Pacific to Seattle, Washington. Compared to the throngs attending the first funeral the ceremony was quiet and without fanfare, attended by less than a hundred souls. A handful of fans observed from outside Butterworth Mortuary on East Pine Street. Newspapers had not been alerted and the public was unaware. It is questionable as to the real difference it may have made, since Bruce's first films had shown only in Chinese movie houses throughout the United States. The film shortly to make his name a household word had yet another month before it would be shown. The family was thus spared a duplication of the Hong Kong nightmare.

Pallbearers for the service in Seattle were Bruce's brother Robert, along with James Coburn, Steve McQueen, Taky Kimura, Dan Inosanto, and Peter Chang. Across the closed casket was an adaptation of Bruce's personal yin and yang design (the Chinese symbol of opposites, existing in all forms of natural expression). As the men threw white gloves into the grave, James Coburn, who loved Bruce as a brother, spoke these parting words: "Farewell, my brother. It has been an honor to share this space in time with you. As a friend and as a teacher you have given to me and have brought my physical, spiritual, and psychological selves together. Thank you, dear friend....may peace be with you."

Bruce lies now on a grassy hillside at Lakeview Cemetery overlooking beautiful Lake Washington in Seattle. In a last statement about her husband, Linda, in a voice filled with emotion, spoke simply from her heart: "Bruce lived every single day as though it might be the last. Each one was a day of discovery. His thirty-two years were filled with living."

As an eagle flies high and still higher into the blue until finally out of sight, so too did Bruce disappear into the vastness of the unknown. It is not for us to say it was too soon nor that it was not his proper time. We are all transients on our own individual journey into the cosmos of immortality. Perhaps when all is said and done it is true that the real meaning of life comes not from measured time but rather from the quality of each life....a quality and a life given to each of us and is unique.