

Edinburgh International Film Festival – What To See This Saturday

As the name suggests, there is a very international flavour to this festival, with the majority of films being at least partially in another language. Both of my picks for Saturday are subtitled movies: one Swedish and one Chinese.



Flicker

Happy endings, but no meatballs.

In small-town Sweden, a local telecoms company is going through a rough patch, as are many of its employees. Whether it's a technician with dry roasted nuts, a cleaner with arachnophobia or an executive with terminal loneliness, everyone could be doing a little better.

Like a cross between *The Office* and Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, *Flicker* tells several stories that weave in and out of each other and are bookended by a pair of power cuts that leave the town of Backberga in complete darkness. Writer/director Patrik Eklund has crafted an astonishingly tight screenplay for his first feature-length film; absolutely everything is connected in some way. This is a movie that will reward repeat viewings, and will probably be just as funny every time. The comedy in *Flicker* is the comedy of real life, of frustration and irritation – something everyone can relate to.

Flicker's best asset though is its cast. Everyone in the large ensemble is uniformly excellent, so much so that it would be unfair to single anyone out. Each creates a real person that

we can relate with, sympathise with and laugh with (or at, as the case may be) while Eklund keeps things moving from one story to the next at just the right time. Despite the various disasters that each character faces – everything from a Blue Screen Of Death at just the wrong moment to sterility, via an allergic reaction to electricity itself – the movie ends on an uplifting sense of optimism. Let's call this the feel-good hit of the year, shall we? Maybe that will get me a poster quote.

Saturday evening's screening will be the first time Flicker is shown outside its homeland. Trust me, you don't want to miss it.



Dragon (or Wu Xia)

If Holmes had been Chinese...

It is 1917. Liu Jingxi is a simple man, working in his village's paper mill. One day a pair of bandits come through the village and try to rob the general store. Liu is there at the time and hides, but when the bandits are about to kill the elderly storekeeper, he suddenly attacks them, killing them both. While the rest of the village hails him a hero, the detective Xu Baijiu arrives to investigate the deaths. What he discovers will change everything.

Dragon is the latest film from director Peter Chen (The Warlords). Playing out as a mix of A History Of Violence and One-Armed Swordsman, with a dash of Sherlock thrown in for good measure, it is the latest movie to show off what a movie star Donnie Yen is. Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li are the most well-known in the West, but Donnie Yen should be more famous than all of them. Arguably a better martial artist, he is definitely a better actor than any of those three. Here he plays Liu, a man trying to forget his past by living a brand new future, and coming to realise that the past has a way of catching up with you. He is matched by Takeshi Kaneshiro

(House of Flying Daggers) as Xu, the eccentric detective with exceptional deductive skills. Watching Xu recreate in his mind the fight between Liu and the bandits should be enough to keep the Cumberbatch Brigade sated until Steven Moffat makes some more episodes.

This film is one of the most successful genre-blending pictures I have seen from China in a long time. Instead of just wall-to-wall action, this has only three fighting sequences in its 110 minutes. The fights aren't just fights though; they are critical parts of the development of Liu as a character, just as much as the scenes of him at home with his family. Then we get the noirish detective story as Xu tries to piece everything together to get to the truth of who and what Liu really is, accompanied by the dramatically-rendered visual aids seen through his mind's eye. Both halves come together to make a thrilling whole.

While the fights may be short in running time, they are not short in quality. Yen himself served as action choreographer and, like the story, the action is a blend of styles from the more traditional sword- and fist-fights to parkour. He even involves the cattle at one point! Yen's ability to fuse all these influences together means that none of it ever feels anachronistic, even though parkour wasn't invented until about 80 years later.

By the way, that One-Armed Swordsman reference wasn't made lightly: Jimmy Wang – the eponymous amputee himself – stars in Dragon as the gangster leader Liu escaped from all those years ago.

Dragon was a huge hit at Cannes in 2011, and finally has its UK premiere on Saturday evening at the same time as Flicker. Luckily, they are both on again on Sunday afternoon.