THE WRECKING CREW

The Wrecking Crew, released in 1969 and starring Dean Martin, Elke Sommer, Nancy Kwan and Sharon Tate is the fourth and final film in a series of American comedy-spy-fi theatrical releases featuring Martin as secret agent Matt Helm.

As with the previous three Helm spy movies (The Silencers, Murderers' Row, and The Ambushers), it is based only loosely upon Donald Hamilton's 1960 novel of the same title and takes great liberties with the plot and characters, being developed as a spoof of the James Bond films. The Wrecking Crew was the second Helm novel published and the earliest of the books to be adapted.

This was the last film of Tate's to be released before her murder at the hands of Charles Manson's followers on August 9, 1969.
Not known by many is that the film featured a virtual who’s who of American martial arts royalty with Chuck Norris, Joe Lewis, Ed Parker and Bruce Lee all appearing in the film. Bruce Lee was engaged as the martial arts choreographer for the film and insisted on bringing in as many top martial arts exponents as he could.
Joe Lewis squares off against Dean Martin

As the film progressed it became obvious to Dean Martin as well as Producer Irving Allen and Director Phil Karlson that Lee’s skills and the martial arts in general should and would be an integral part of the next Mat Helm movie ‘The Ravagers’

Chuck Norris with Elke Summers and Dean Martin
Bruce Lee was choreographer for the fight scenes but also doubled for Dean Martin in all the fights. World Karate and Kickboxing Champion Joe Lewis and American Kenpo Founder Ed Parker both had fight scenes with Dean Martin as did Chuck Norris making his on screen debut. Many other lesser known Los Angeles based martial artists were also brought in by Lee for the film.

*Ed Parker throws Dean Martin in ‘The Wrecking Crew’*

Martin was not an athletic person and the difference between his movements in the fight scenes and that of Bruce Lees is both stark and obvious.

The film ends with the announcement of a fifth Matt Helm film, *The Ravagers* (which would have been based upon Hamilton’s 1964 novel of the same title). The film was to have featured the return of Sharon Tate along with an expanded martial arts theme and on screen role for Bruce Lee. Dean Martin was so impressed with the screen presence and martial arts skills of Bruce Lee that he lobbied hard for Lee’s inclusion in his next film but Martin was subsequently so distraught over the murder
of his ‘The Wrecking Crew’ co-star and friend Sharon Tate that he abandoned the next already-announced "Matt Helm" motion picture series installment (to be titled "The Ravagers"), and never played the character again.

Bruce Lee doubling for Dean Martin in ‘The Wrecking Crew’

‘The Wrecking Crew’ was released in 1969 and is typical of the spy spoof films from the sixties. Producer Irving Allen, noting the decline in box office for such films, rightly predicted that martial arts movies would be the next ‘big thing’. Though ‘The Ravagers’ project did not proceed he was to be proved right four years later when ‘Enter the Dragon’ was released.

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