

## THE FORBIDDEN KINGDOM PRODUCTION NOTES

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# THE FORBIDDEN KINGDOM

## THE STORY

In the azure mist of winter, a lone figure crouches and moves in hypnotic, poetic beauty. The Great Sage, also known as The Monkey King, expertly cuts the air with his bo staff, carefully watched by Macaque monkeys. Suddenly several Jade Warriors attack him, but he expertly dispatches them one by one with his staff, as the monkeys screech in witness to the exchange.

In the present day, 17-year-old Jason Tripitikas' bedroom is covered with posters of movie stars and martial arts heroes. As a kungfu fanatic, Jason often dreams of The Monkey King and frequents a Chinatown pawn shop, run by a mysterious blind old man named Old Hop, for low-priced kungfu DVDs. One day, he chances upon a six-foot-long bo staff with a bronze monkey carved onto the end at the shop – just like the one the Great Sage uses in his dreams. Old Hop tells him the staff has been in the store since his grandfather opened it a hundred years ago and is not for sale – a man was supposed to come and collect it to return it to its rightful owner, but has never showed up.

Later on, some street gang members accost Jason and force him to help them break into Old Hop's shop to plunder it for cash. Old Hop gets shot by one of the gang members, Lupo. Before he falls to the ground, he thrusts the staff to Jason and urges him to return it to its rightful owner. In the back alley, Lupo threatens Jason for fear he will tell the police. As Jason flees, fearing for his life, he falls from the rooftop gripping tightly to the staff.

When he awakes, Jason realizes that he has been transported back to a village in ancient China together with the staff. When he gets into trouble with a horde of mounted Jade Warriors, a drunken man, Lu Yan, comes to his rescue with Drunken Fist Kungfu, swiftly dispatching the soldiers.

Five hundred years ago, the Great Sage was so impressive in battle that the great Jade Emperor invited him to come before him at his palace. At the Peach Banquet held at the royal orchard, the irreverent Great Sage mocked the Jade Warlord. Infuriated, the Warlord challenged the Great Sage to a duel and tricked him into setting down his staff, and turned him into a statue of solid rock. Amidst the fight, the staff was thrown off Five Elements Mountain and disappeared.

Recognizing the staff, Lu Yan believes that as according to a prophecy foretold, Jason is the one who has to take the staff to Five Elements Mountain, free the Great Sage and fulfill the prophecy – only then will he be able to return home.

Pursued by Jade Warriors coming after the staff and unable to defend himself, Jason asks to be taken under Lu Yan's wings. Along the way, they meet Golden Sparrow, a young girl apt with lethal darts out to avenge her parents' death by the evil Warlord. She joins them on their journey while Jason starts his kungfu training under Lu Yan's tutelage.

Meanwhile, the Jade Warlord summons the help of a deadly assassin – the White-Haired Demoness, to regain the staff and stop it from reaching the Great Sage.

One day, the travelers meet a figure on a white horse – the Silent Monk, who attempts to take the staff from them. After Lu Yan and the Silent Monk engage in a duel, they soon realize that the Silent Monk is also on the path to free the Great Sage and decide to join forces.

As time passes, seasons change. Jason continues his training under both Lu Yan and the Silent Monk. As the travelers press onward, they are suddenly confronted by the ominous White-Haired Demoness, who demands that they hand over the staff so she may exchange it for the elixir of immortality from the Jade Warlord. A fight ensues, and although the travelers manage to escape with the staff, Lu Yan is wounded with a poisonous arrow in his back.

The travelers take the wounded Lu Yan to a temple, but he is dying. Jason wants to retrieve the immortal elixir from the palace to save Lu Yan but the Silent Monk refuses, declaring that their mission to return the staff is more important than one man's life. That night, Jason sneaks off to confronts the Jade Warlord at his palace and is caught by the White-Haired Demoness. Jason offers the Warlord the staff in exchange for the elixir but the White-Haired Demoness is livid at losing her potion of immortality as promised by the Warlord. The scheming Warlord sets them up for a duel with the winner to be the recipient of the elixir.

As a brutal fight ensues, Jason loses the staff to the Warlord and is defeated by the Demoness. As he is about to be beheaded by a guard, Golden Sparrow and the Silent Monk arrive just in time to save him. The Warlord is determined to destroy the staff and throws it into the Eight Trigram Furnace. However, the Silent Monk manages to leap into the Furnace to make a gravity-defying save. Seething with rage, the Warlord and the Silent Monk continue to fight for possession of the staff.

Meanwhile, the White-Haired Demoness goes after the elixir placed at the throne. Jason and Golden Sparrow try to stop her but being no match for her prowess, they desperately fight for their lives against her and the soldiers. Suddenly, thirteen temple monks armed with staffs arrive to help them. They manage to secure the vial of elixir and pass it on to a figure on a

stretcher they had carried in – it is Lu Yan.

In his drunken stupor, Lu Yan and the monks take on the White-Haired Demoness and the guards. Lu Yan defeats the Demoness and throws her to her death off the Five Elements Mountain.

At this time, the Silent Monk armed with the staff attempts to reach for the stone statue of the Monkey King. Unwittingly, he gets speared by the Warlord but manages to pass the staff to Jason before he collapses. Jason swings the staff at the stone statue and shatters it into a thousand pieces. A blast of blinding white light reveals the Monkey King in his original form! Jason realizes that he has awakened the Great Sage.

The Warlord launches a surprise attack on the Monkey King but is quickly deflected and instead, he gets hurled to the ground. Golden Sparrow jumps before the Warlord to avenge her parents' deaths but takes a lethal blow from him. A ferocious combat continues between the Warlord and the Monkey King. When the Warlord gets thrown near Jason, he puts an end to the evil one's life with Golden Sparrow's jade dart.

The Jade Emperor arrives from the skies and surveys the aftermath. He declares to the Monkey King that he has served his time, and must now do good on earth by leading the journey to find the scriptures of illumination. As for Lu Yan, the Emperor declares him the Eighth Immortal. The Monkey King then uses his powers and his staff to send Jason home.

Jason wakes up in an alley in the city, surrounded by trash. He stands up to Lupo and the gang and defends himself with newfound power and confidence. As he practices kungfu on the rooftop of his apartment against the sunrise, Jason is ready to walk the path of the warrior and find his own truth.

## **BACKGROUND**

In *The Forbidden Kingdom*, screenwriter John Fusco has extracted elements from the following Chinese legends and novels and devised these into an original screenplay.

### **The Monkey King**

One of the most well-known and popular characters in Chinese mythology, the Monkey King, is the main character of the Chinese classic novel "Journey to the West" by Wu Ch'eng-En, who was a scholar-official in the 1500s. Hailed as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of

Chinese literature, it is based on the true story of a famous monk, Xuan Zang of the Tang Dynasty.

Legend has it that the Monkey King was born out of a mystical rock weathered by the elements over many centuries. Upon jumping through a waterfall on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, he discovered the Water Curtain Cave and was proclaimed as the Monkey King by the other monkeys for his feat. Although initially elated, he soon realized that he would someday face death and began to seek immortality. He traveled on a raft to new lands seeking a way and eventually became a disciple of Subhuti. Under the Patriarch's pupilage and with his intense intelligence and determination, he soon mastered the boundless powers of transformation and achieved the ability to transcend form and existence with up to seventy-two different forms. He could even take flight on clouds, traveling by leaps and bounds of some hundred and eight thousand miles in a single leap.

To the displeasure of the Patriarch, the Monkey King began boasting to his fellow disciples and so they parted ways. He then discovered a magical staff (stick-shaped weapon) called the "Ru Yi Bang". Originally an unmovable treasure used by the Dragon King of the Sea Palace to keep the ebb and flow of the sea balanced, the staff extended from undersea into the high heavens and weighed some seven thousand kilograms. Under his powerful control, the Monkey King shrank the staff at will, reducing it into the size of a needle and took it with him, causing an upheaval in the undersea.

In a bid to tame the Monkey King, the Great Jade Emperor, the only authority over the heavens, the seas, the earth and the subterranean world, invited him to the Heavenly Kingdom with the offer of a promotion and title, but was instead met with rebellion. The Monkey King gobbled up the Empress' "Peaches of Immortality", Master Lao Tzu's "Elixir of Longevity" and wrecked havoc in the Kingdom. He was now virtually invincible and indestructible. The heavenly figures of authority that were dispatched to subdue him met with little success as the Monkey King easily defeated them as well as the Heavenly Army of a hundred thousand soldiers.

The Monkey King was eventually captured through the combined efforts of numerous celestial warriors and sentenced to capital punishment. Impenetrable by all swords and weapons set upon him, he was thus, banished to be burnt in a sacred furnace of flames. Left burning for forty-nine days, the cauldron suddenly exploded and out emerged the Monkey King, now full of blind rage and more destructive than before.

Having exhausted all avenues, the Great Jade Emperor then turned to the Buddha himself for help. The Buddha wagered a bet with the Monkey King that the latter would not be able to jump out of his palm, and if he lost the bet, he would be banished to mortal Earth for centuries to

learn lessons of humility. Smug and certain he could do it with his cloud-travel skills, the Monkey King accepted the bet and demanded the Great Jade Emperor's title if he won. He then took his greatest leap and reached what he perceived to be the ends of Heaven, where he saw nothing but five pillars. To prove that he had won the bet, he arrogantly wrote on one of the pillars - "The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven, was here" and took his irrepressible behavior a step further by urinating on another pillar.

When he returned to face the Buddha, the Monkey King was shocked when shown his own writing on the Buddha's middle finger. Indeed, he had never left the Buddha's palm. Having lost the bet, the Monkey King turned to escape but the Buddha transformed his five fingers into the great Five Peak Mountain consisting of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) and imprisoned The Monkey King, who remained trapped under the great mountain for the next 500 years.

Eventually, the Monkey King was given a chance at redemption when the Buddha sent him on a mission to accompany and protect Xuan Zang on his quest to retrieve Buddhist sutras from India. Thus began the epic allegorical and adventure tale of "Journey to the West".

### **The Eight Immortals**

As a legendary group of immortal beings well known in Chinese mythology and secular Chinese culture, the Eight Immortals are revered by Taoists and widely considered to be symbols of prosperity and longevity. With the power to transform, each Immortal possesses his or her own unique power to give life and destroy evil.

The Immortals are:

- Immortal Woman He (He Xiangu), the only female deity of the group and believed to be a health goddess with the power to improve one's mental and physical health.
- Royal Uncle Cao (Cao Guojiu), said to be the uncle of the Emperor of the Song Empire with a jade tablet that has the power to purify the environment.
- Iron-Crutch Li (Tieguai Li), easily identifiable by his gourd bottle and iron crutch. Li's soul emanates as a vapour cloud from the gourd.
- Deity Lan Caihe, armed with a flower basket containing flora and is associated with longevity.
- Lu Dongbin, the most widely known of the group of deities and who is also considered by some as the de facto leader.
- Philosopher Han Xiang (Han Xiang Zi), who is devoted to the study of Taoism and possesses a flute with the power to give life.

- Elder Zhang Guo (Zhang Guo Lao), who is regarded as a master of Taoist breath regulation (Qigong), and also known to be the most eccentric immortal with a penchant for wine.
- Zhong Li Quan, the official leader who is recognized by his bare chest, his belly and his magical fan that can revive the dead.

### **The Bride with White Hair**

In the 1954 martial arts novel by Leung Yu-Sang, which was made into a feature film in 1993 by Hong Kong director Ronny Yu and director of photography Peter Pau, the story detailed the ill-fated love between Wu Tang clan swordsman Cho Yi-Hang and Lien Ni-Chang, the top assassin for the rival Supreme Cult.

The heroic Cho falls for his nemesis, Ni Chang, who in turn comes to love him, a man she was ordered to kill by her master. A misunderstanding leads to Ni Chang believing that Cho has betrayed her and results in her long hair turning white in an instant. She became known as the Bride With White Hair (White-Haired Demoness) and turns into a man-hater, viciously killing off men who cannot pit their skills against her prowess.

Meanwhile, in despair and in a bid to win back Ni Chang's love, Cho climbs a mountain and waits for ten years to pick the "majestic flower" to return Ni Chang's glorious hair to its original black. The rose blooms only once every twenty years and is believed to be the cure for any illness.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

### **Production Information**

Jackie Chan and Jet Li, the two most revered martial arts superstar actors in the world today, have come together for the very first time in filmmaking history to pit their skills in *The Forbidden Kingdom* as Lu Yan and the Silent Monk respectively.

In this one-of-a-kind project, producer Casey Silver has not only succeeded in bringing together an exceptional group of people, including some of the best talent in Asian and Western cinema, for the first truly international Asian blockbuster movie. He has also pulled off a great feat in making the entire film in China.

This epic production is written by veteran screenwriter John Fusco, whose past works

include the Academy Award®-nominated *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, and directed by Rob Minkoff of *The Lion King* fame, who brings his unique blend of character, comedy, drama and storytelling to the enthralling and innovative time-traveling story structure.

In this spectacular and unpredictable epic action-adventure tale, Boston teenager Jason Tripitikas (Michael Angarano) confronts the toughest journey he has ever faced in his life – one which takes him through ancient China, facing battles with murderous Jade Warriors, the villainous Jade Warlord (Collin Chou) and the indomitable one with no remorse and no conscience – the White-Haired Demoness (Li Bingbing). Last but not least, Jason experiences first love with a revenge-bent female fighter (Liu Yifei).

Executive producers are Ryan Kavanaugh of Relativity Media for Lionsgate, Raffaella De Laurentiis, Yuen Wo Ping, and brothers Wang Zhongjun and Wang Zhonglei for Huayi Brothers Pictures. The behind-the-scenes creative team includes production designer Bill Brzeski, editor Eric Strand, visual effects supervisor Ron Simonson and costume designer Shirley Chan. Music for the feature is by David Buckley.

Martial arts offerings of recent years have mostly been rather somber affairs with bigger and bigger production budgets and lofty aspirations to be the next runaway success the likes of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. However, the direction set for *The Forbidden Kingdom* is very different.

Producer Casey Silver explains, “Unlike previous martial arts films, Rob’s tone as a storyteller is peppered with a whimsical playfulness and a comedic bent. He understands romance and he understands emotions. He has been able to depict the classic hero’s journey consisting of thematic underpinnings with a humorous tone which is what we wanted to achieve.”

Also, unlike previous productions, the filmmakers have attempted to make a movie that is not targeted at a specific audience, but to make it fun and enjoyable for the entire family. Director Rob Minkoff attests to this, “People have been taking martial arts films too seriously. So this film will be something that everyone can enjoy – kids, teenagers, their parents and their grandparents.”

Silver affirms, “There are so many different characters that different segments of the audience can connect with, I am sure there is something in it for everyone.”

Action superstar Jet Li, who has two young daughters, sees the wide appeal of the film as a definite plus point, “Having made so many violent movies in my career to date, I thought it was about time I made a film that families with children will be able to enjoy together. This is the film that I am making for my two girls.”

By harking back to the most outstanding Chinese legendary characters like the Monkey King, the Bride With White Hair and the Eight Immortals, Fusco and Minkoff have turned the unlikely and challenging combination of Eastern elements with a Western interpretation into an inspiring payoff.

Actor Michael Angarano surmises, "This has to be the ultimate adventure for anybody. It is classic martial arts, with a blend of Chinese cinema, literature, tradition, history and actors, but with American storytellers - a mix that has never been seen on film. And this, combined with the ultimate timeless story about a boy who, finding himself in a totally unfamiliar world, journeys and grows to become a stronger and better person, is what's mesmerizing."

All these, together with the most exciting action stunts imaginable from the world's top martial arts maestro Yuen Wo Ping, and the arresting cinematography of Academy Award®-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* director of photography Peter Pau, culminates into the ultimate martial arts movie.

"Making the first film in which Jackie Chan and Jet Li are starring together is in itself already special. But being both a martial arts film and a contemporary American film makes this film unlike any martial arts film before. All we want to do is to make a good movie; a fun, good movie that will appeal to both the East and the West, and I think we have done it," surmises executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis.

Actor Collin Chou rounds up, "This is such a great production combination. We have the world's best director of photography and action choreographer, the best producers, screenwriter and director. Last but not least, we have the two best martial arts superstars in the world – Jackie and Jet. How do you top this?"

The Forbidden Kingdom is thus brought to life as the martial arts action-adventure movie audiences all over the world have all been waiting for.

## **The Screenplay**

About four years ago, veteran screenwriter John Fusco started concocting a bedtime story for his young son who shared his father's love for Chinese martial arts novels and kungfu cinema. Nightly, Fusco would make up a chapter that followed the time-travels of a bullied American kid who gets transported back to mythical China and is charged with the quest of returning a lost fighting staff to the Monkey King of the Chinese legend. As the boy embarked on his journey to the East, he would encounter other characters from both classic Chinese literature, martial arts legends, and even kungfu cinema.

When Fusco shared this enigmatic story with producer Casey Silver on the Moroccan set of their 2004 film *Hidalgo*, Silver responded immediately. “When John told me about the bedtime story he was telling his son, I was completely enamored and saw that it would be a great idea for a movie. So I commissioned him to write a screenplay based on the story and we worked on it together for a year,” says Silver.

Having studied Korean martial arts at the age of thirteen, a year before the “Kung Fu” TV series and the films of Bruce Lee created an explosion of martial arts popularity in the U.S., Fusco has an unwavering interest in martial arts and its philosophy. So it comes as no surprise that his childhood love of Chinese culture and martial arts has found its way into *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

Says action superstar Jackie Chan, “You can tell that John is deeply mesmerized by Chinese culture and Chinese kungfu movies from the way he has incorporated all the different characters into one movie, from the Drunken Master, the Heavenly King, the Monkey King, the Eight Immortals, the Bride with White Hair, just about everybody. So when I first heard the story from Casey three years ago, I was sold by the ideology of how we can convert this tale based on ancient Chinese legends starting out from Chinese culture to become world culture.”

Fusco is definitely no stranger to stories that explore cultural myths and legend. Whether in the rich tradition of American blues that was featured in *Crossroads*, the Wild West as seen in *Young Guns* and *Hidalgo*, or the Native America poignantly depicted in *Thunderheart*, *Dreamkeeper* and the Academy Award®-nominated animation *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, Fusco passionately researches the history behind such legends and adeptly weaves them into his screenplays.

“I was deeply motivated to introduce such rich Chinese legends as the Monkey King to a global Western audience for the first time in the history of filmmaking,” says Fusco. “By bringing back some of these classic Chinese ideas and characters, we hope to expose Chinese culture and history to a whole new audience who aren’t so familiar with these classic legends and characters. If we can get the younger generations and the Western moviegoers to develop an interest in exploring these classics further after watching the movie, we would have achieved our goals,” professes Fusco.

Actor Michael Angarano who stars as the time-traveling teenage protagonist says, “Honestly when I read the script, it was all new to me, the legend of the Monkey King and the rest of the characters. But once I had done the research and made myself more familiar, I could not wait to be a part of this film.” He continues, “The composite of all these ancient Chinese legends, folk stories, culture and history, both real and fictitious, made it really exciting. I

simply fell in love with the story and the entire journey that my character goes through.”

The other actors were similarly inspired by the unusual structure and derivation of the film.

Chinese actress Li Bingbing who plays the White-Haired Demoness (otherwise known as the Bride With White Hair) comments, “This is a film which has incorporated a Western point of view to traditional Chinese mythology and culture. Visually, the imagery of the Monkey King and the White-Haired Demoness may be as they are, but what you cannot begin to imagine is how John and Rob have injected their interpretation of these characters together. So you can be sure there will be plenty of surprise elements in the film.”

The other acting villain Collin Chou adds, “It is pure ingenuity for John to develop such a smart idea for a screenplay. By using the Monkey King as a basis and through adapting and interspersing different characters from the many well-known Chinese legends, he has created a totally unique story. Brilliant.”

With contribution from the three directors Rob Minkoff, Yuen Wo Ping and Peter Pau to complete the narrative vision, the end result of this compelling combination of adventure and a hero’s journey, mysticism, martial arts, history, action, romance and drama, armed with a dream cast and creative team, set in exotic locations in China and with visual effects completed in Korea, can be nothing short of phenomenal.

“It is John’s original story and he deserves all the credit for composing such a fantastic screenplay. We hope that this movie inspires young people in a positive way,” producer Casey Silver concludes.

### **The Meaning of Kungfu**

*The Forbidden Kingdom* is not the cinematic version of any specific Chinese literary work and even less of the classic Chinese novel "Journey to the West". Rather, the filmmakers wanted to draw some of the characters and situations from such tradition to tell a new and contemporary story.

Producer Casey Silver explains, “The movie is about a classic hero’s journey. It is a big adventure movie with exotic locations and characters, humor, action, romance, even some fantasy elements. At the core of it, it has an emotional center and a specific theme – one that inspires.”

Executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis adds, “This movie has its heart in the right place.”

Silver was filming *Hidalgo* five years ago in Morocco when screenwriter John Fusco told him the story of *The Forbidden Kingdom* and got him hooked.

“My son practices martial arts and I started to wonder why there hasn’t been a broad appeal movie for the West with a deeper idea about the beauty and poetry, as well as the deeper philosophy that underlies kungfu. The possibility of capturing something that would translate to a Western audience and have the cinematic elements of acrobatics and athleticism and to showcase above all of that, the underlying philosophy of: “What does kungfu mean?” ” What is it really about?” was the primary thread in my head once John told me the story,” explains Silver.

Agrees Fusco, “Besides hoping that Western moviegoers come away from this movie wanting to read “Journey To The West” and to explore more about the classic Chinese novels and mythology, we also hope that they come away from the movie having learned that there is more to kungfu.” At the end of his adventures, the young hero in *The Forbidden Kingdom* would learn to face his fears while learning the deeper meaning of kungfu.

Similarly, the actors and filmmakers have experienced the same from making this revolutionary movie. "Kungfu is a philosophy. It is a way of life; not just a way of fighting, but a way of thinking. It is a way of peace, it is a way to find yourself, and a way to be at peace with everything around you," shares actor Michael Angarano who has completely embraced the beliefs of kungfu since participating in the film.

“With the source material for this movie stemming from Chinese mythology and Chinese popular culture, *The Forbidden Kingdom* is a celebration of all that and at the risk of being redundant, the philosophy underlying the deeper meanings of kungfu,” says Fusco.

## **Directing**

As the story goes, director Rob Minkoff, who had been invited by the University of Beijing to conduct a lecture for the film composing class to discuss animation, was asked by one of the students at the end of the lecture if he had ever considered the story of “The Monkey King” as a film. Serendipitously, not too long after, Minkoff took up the film when it came across his desk. “It was very much an omen. The script was terrific; all the characters were charismatic and jumped to life. And the opportunity to work with Jet Li and Jackie Chan was such a once in a lifetime opportunity. I agreed at once,” proclaims Minkoff.

Producer Casey Silver relates, “I had met with a number of directors but I was really taken with Rob, both because of his past work obviously, and also for his great interest, admiration and respect for Chinese culture. I found him to be extraordinarily astute about the stories, the

characters and the story structure. This, combined with his past experience and the movies he has made, seemed to make him the perfect man for the job. I think I chose well and we are very lucky to have him.”

The other actors all testify to Silver’s prediction.

Says actor Jackie Chan, “In order to make this movie, you must like Chinese culture and need to get into the Chinese culture and into China very quickly. Otherwise you wouldn’t know how to shoot it. I think it helps that his fiancé (now wife) is Chinese.”

“Rob has been great. We have had some lengthy discussions on how to translate the film from its original Western point of view to a movie that would be appreciated even by Asians and the Chinese. He has not had an easy time in China because for two such different cultures to work together, it is really not an easy task,” says actor Jet Li.

Actor Michael Angarano analyses, “Rob is a great storyteller as you can tell from his past movies, but in this movie especially, he is really able to bring all the visual aspects and all the internal aspects of the movie to life. There are so many different elements to this movie which you don't realize at first - so much special effects, action, Chinese directors, Chinese actors and this one American actor all going on at the same time, so there could be a lot of miscommunication, but Rob has done a really good job of being the ringleader leading the way through this epic,”

Li Bingbing gushes, “Rob is not only a very kind man with a great heart, he is without any airs. He is extremely precise in his job and would not only correct us on our eye movements, he would also helped us with our English diction and show us how to say the lines with the correct intonation so that we can come closer to our characters.”

Actor Collin Chou also adds, “ With such a creative production team, it is only right that Rob Minkoff, from the very successful *The Lion King*, is helming this production. I am definitely looking forward to watching this movie which has been made under Rob’s vision of a kungfu epic and see what new aspects he has brought to this set of characters that everyone in the East is knowledgeable about.”

## **Casting**

It was producer Casey Silver's hope and ambition from the start to cast Jackie Chan and Jet Li in the lead roles once he had read the screenplay. Thus began the journey of trying to secure the two big stars that had never once collaborated on a film.

Silver first got in touch with Li who is based in Southern California, and passed him the

script. When they met shortly thereafter, Li already had one foot in the door. "It was very lucky and fortuitous for me to give Jet a screenplay for a character he had interest in already. He was not only incredibly articulate about the character of the Monkey King, and the meaning of the character in China, his observations about the material from a pure Chinese perspective was extremely helpful. He also had a fascination and an interest in bringing that character to an international audience," says Silver.

Silver's next stop was to get Jackie Chan on board. "I remember standing at my son's soccer game when I got the call saying Jackie Chan was interested, and I flew straight to Hong Kong, met with Jackie and found him to also be incredibly open and incredibly generous about the idea."

Chan is not reticent to say that he was first and foremost attracted to *The Forbidden Kingdom* simply because Jet Li would be in it too, "I have always hoped to make movies with some people whom I really admire like Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro before I retire from this business. Jet Li is someone whom I have been wanting to work with for more than ten years."

Unknown to the world, Li and Chan have actually had two missed opportunities at working together - once fifteen years ago and another time eight years ago. So upon hearing that the other would be involved in *The Forbidden Kingdom*, it was a strong push factor and serendipitous of sorts as well for the both of them. Chan attests, "Once I heard that Jet had agreed to do it, I agreed right away."

Says Li, "Finally, we get to work together. Of course I am delighted. Before this production, we are already close friends so this has been such a great opportunity. If given a chance, I will definitely work with Jackie again." Chan agrees, "It has been really fun!"

Silver attests again, "They both read the script and there were great parts for each of them so they were drawn to the characters. It is a testament to the strength of John's screenplay because I could obviously get the material to the stars but the material has to speak for itself."

The role of Jason was first presented to Michael Angarano by casting director Nancy Foy. As Angarano fondly recalls, "After my initial audition for Rob, I was put through a physical test of three hours of kungfu training together with several other kids. It was to test our martial arts learning potential. Following that, I met Jackie Chan on the set of *Rush Hour 3*. He was really friendly. That was the final step of the audition and before I knew it, I had the part and I was in China."

For the role of Ni Chang, three Asian actresses were short listed by Canadian-based casting director, Poping Auyeung who specializes in the casting of Asians. The role eventually

went to acclaimed Chinese actress Li Bingbing who aced the audition with Silver and director Rob Minkoff with her flawless rendition of the English dialogue.

Li explained, "When Rob, Casey and Raffaella first saw me, they couldn't reconcile my looks with their impression of the White-Haired Demoness. They were under the impression that she was to be an older woman with flowing white hair. It was only after I showed them how I would perform the role that they became convinced that I was right for the part."

Minkoff had met Li Bingbing prior to the audition at his birthday dinner a couple of years back. This was way before he knew he was doing the movie. Since having worked with her, he only has this to say now, "Bingbing has done an amazing job. She takes her job very seriously and is incomparable to anyone else I have worked with in terms of dedication and determination."

Jackie Chan agrees that Li is the best choice for the role of the White-Haired Demoness, "I have known Bingbing for over ten years. She may be a big star in China but she is still willing to try new things, even if it is a villain role, even though she is not the main lead actress. That is what I really appreciate about her."

In the case of Golden Sparrow, Auyeung showed Minkoff all sorts of different performers who might be able to do it. Liu Yifei stood out in particular and Auyeung felt very strongly that she would be perfect for the role. After meeting with Minkoff and going through some of the scenes together, she was deemed to be the ideal candidate, despite her height, which may have made her an unlikely "sparrow". "She is an incredible performer and is very serious about her work for such a young age. She has brought an intensity to the character which really steals the show," professes Minkoff.

## **Cinematography**

For a production of this scale, ambition and genre, it was of utmost importance to find someone who could straddle both the East and the West at the same time. Facing challenges in terms of language and communication with both the large number of Asian crew and cast, a single word lost in translation could result in crucial misunderstandings, acutely affecting the film production process. Renowned director of photography Peter Pau thus became the obvious and only choice from the very beginning.

Muses producer Casey Silver, "Peter is undoubtedly a master at his craft. Without him, we would not have been able to deliver the picture we have delivered. So to have somebody who bridges East and West and who is as gifted a cinematographer as he is, we have been extremely

fortunate.”

Like the rest, Pau was attracted to the film because of the strong script and cast elements. “I think it is a great idea putting two of the most significant and well known Chinese martial artists together in a film and shooting it entirely in China. My initial response to this was “Wow, what a great opportunity to be working with the two greats in a film!”“ says Pau.

He adds, “Also, this very ambitious script not only provides learnings into Chinese virtue, it is unique in the way that it links cross-cultural events in the modern and the ancient worlds. Being a martial arts practitioner, John Fusco must have treated the script as part of his journey into comprehending Chinese culture. By entwining the two unique cultures together, he has made it meaningful, yet entertaining and fun.”

For Pau, this is by far the biggest film he has shot in China to date. He says, “I had to put up two units with more than fifty crew members each for the cameras, lighting and grip departments. For everyone to maintain a consistently high standard and professional working attitude in a 17-week shoot with three to five weeks of preparation was quite a challenge indeed. Plus, there was the intensive travelling required for both the crew and the equipment. But I must say I am very pleased with my crew and their working spirit.”

Silver adds, “I have great admiration for Peter. If we were making a movie in Hollywood, it would already be a blessing to have him. But to have him on this project makes it wonderfully special for all of us here from Hollywood. Working with Peter has been an incredibly significant ingredient to realizing the look and feel of *The Forbidden Kingdom*.”

Approaching cinematography through the eyes of an artist, Pau describes the source of his inspiration, “If the mild non-saturated tone of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was inspired by Chinese watercolour painting, then based on the fact that *The Forbidden Kingdom* is a fantasy-adventure-action film with lots of room for creativity, it’s purely Van Gogh’s nature saturated with vivid colours.”

The whole filming process was made easier with the new Panavision digital Genesis camera systems that Pau used. He is the first in Asia to do so and professes, “I am very pleased by the quality of the CCD and of course, the lenses of Panavision, the one-hour-recording capability and the possibility for it to run at 48fps in real frames. It’s a reliable and safe system that we have tested with the heat and dust in the desert, the moisture at the waterfalls and mountain valley and the heavy-duty usage in the non-air-conditioned stages in hot summer. There is no danger of shipping it out and having the “negatives” processed and so far no dust or scratches reported.”

Known for his relentless vision and hard work, Pau has single-mindedness and a drive that

distinguishes him from the rest of the horde. As Pau explains fully, “I usually pre-plan all shots at the beginning of the day to make sure the shots-order works well with the actors, with the equipment set-ups and saves time. I try to incorporate as much movement as possible but yet not jeopardize the processes on the day of the shoot.”

An example of how Pau completes his work with aplomb can be seen in how he shot what he considers to be the most important fight scene of the film. “For Jackie and Jet’s fight, I suggested a stage interior of a ruin temple and created a golden major hour look with a subdued atmosphere to enhance the action. I think this is the most memorable scene of the film so I put all my focus on it. As Rob and Wo Ping asked for the actors to be able to move around as much as possible, I resorted to using a 15-foot Technocrane for the flexibility, and two remote heads with two Super Sky-Mode cranes to enable extensive movements by both the main and action units. My crew of camera and grip did a fantastic job as always,” elaborates Pau.

Besides his ability to execute and move things through every day as an accomplished cinematographer with no language or cultural barrier working in China, Pau’s celebrated work in numerous martial arts films especially in the acclaimed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, together with his Chinese background, culminated into a cultural sensitivity and awareness that ignites the material Western interpreted material something precious and tangibly Chinese.

Pau shares his experience on making martial arts come alive, “The timing of the movement is the key issue to emphasizing action. The crane movement usually involves one or more crane operators, dolly operators, zoom control person, either on a Technocrane or zoom lens, and I myself will be operating the remote control head. To put all these people in sync with the fast paced action requires what I called “dancing beats”. All the relevant crew must memorize the action beats in order to do this right. That needs a dedicated crew to work years together to achieve such a result.”

Director Rob Minkoff is full of appreciation, “Peter has been a terrific collaborator as we have had to rely on him to show us the true Chinese traditions that end up in the content of this film. It is very important to me that the film does not end up being an Americanized version of this Chinese story even though it is telling the story of an American boy and his journey to this foreign place.”

### **Action Choreography**

Getting an action director who could appease the two superstars of martial arts cinema was not easy. As producer Casey Silver says, "The only choreographer who could truly stand in

the middle between these two giants and serve each of them, serve the movie, bring credibility and respect from everybody and keep it all real was Yuen Wo Ping."

Jet Li was all for hiring Yuen Wo Ping to do the job. "Everyone knows that Wo Ping is the most famous action director in China and in the world. That is why I really pushed very hard to work with him again in this movie. I told the producers that they must bring Wo Ping into this movie. I believe in him and that he and his team will deliver great things for this movie." Wo Ping and Jet have worked together consistently over the years, the most recent film being the period martial arts piece, *Fearless*.

While Yuen Wo Ping was waiting for Li and Chan to commit to the film, Li and Chan were doing the same. That was the amount of standing Yuen Wo Ping had in the hearts of Chan and Li. "Wo Ping, for me, was an essential ingredient to making this movie work so I spent a long time wooing Wo Ping to the table," says Silver. They all ended up saying yes at the same time.

Besides his work in Asian cinema, Yuen Wo Ping has also made Hollywood films like *The Matrix*, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. These are all movies choreographed by Yuen Wo Ping that has translated globally and become massive box office hits.

There is another fascinating story within this: Yuen Wo Ping directed Jackie Chan in *Drunken Master* in 1978, and the Lu Yan character in this film is loosely based on the Drunken Master, which was incidentally played by Wo Ping's father. Chan and Yuen Wo Ping's history go way back to when they were kids, the two of them actually grew up together learning martial arts in the same school. However, they have not worked together in more than two decades and coming together for *The Forbidden Kingdom* is the reunion that everyone has been anticipating.

"What we really wanted was to get the best choreographer we could because we were putting the world's two best martial artists together and we did not want to disappoint the audience. We wanted what was to be choreographed for them to be at the highest level possible. And I have heard stories from Jackie about growing up and working closely with Wo Ping on their earlier films. So this is like a reunion for all of them," says Silver.

Earlier in the process before principal photography, Yuen Wo Ping, Silver, director Rob Minkoff and John Fusco the writer, would discuss the script and map out the stories that would take place before and after each fight scene. This kept an eye on the characters and the narrative they were trying to tell and within those boundaries, they would discuss the broad strokes of where the story was heading. The numerous fight sequences were also worked into the different set designs.

Minkoff says, "Wo Ping has been given a very wide berth with a lot of leeway to create, interpret and use his inspirations. As such, in all the many different ways, regardless of how big or small, the fight sequences for Chan, Li, Drunken Master or the Monkey King, are all different reflections of Yuen Wo Ping himself."

To allow the master to present his work, Silver and Minkoff have generously stepped back on many occasions. As observed by Silver, "I was struck by the beauty of the martial artistry that Wo Ping has created."

The action choreography for this film was done in the certain style that many Asian martial arts films are completed but not like how the American martial arts films are done. Using the Hong Kong style of action filmmaking means that the stunt team is choreographing the fight about five minutes before the fight is filmed. For some of the non-trained actors, it took some getting used to.

"At first, it was quite intimidating for me as we did not get a chance to rehearse the moves adequately. But as filming went on, I found myself getting more and more used to it. I could adapt to the moves and the pace better," says Michael Angarano. "It is all about your mindset. You cannot think about what you are going to do. They show you what you have to do, you learn it and you just do it, and you have to do it fast."

Yuen Wo Ping takes the ideas of the basic storytelling and then spins them in a new way and this is carried out on the day of the shoot. This is untypical of any Hollywood production.

"Wo Ping, his brothers and a couple of his key team people will get together, form a basic idea, and they literally work out a few moves at a time, where one will suggest an idea and then someone else will refine it and then another person will take it and suggest something else. At the end of it, Wo Ping is the one who says yes to the final idea. And then they go ahead and shoot it," explains Minkoff, "When the camera is moving and the actors are moving and spinning around, they literally shoot everything one moment at a time. To do this kind of work is to cut into the camera literally, collecting piece by piece what you need and then put them together literally like a jigsaw puzzle. It's quite unusual because sometimes they move the camera in three hundred and sixty degrees which requires all of the crew to move all of the lighting equipment so they shoot on one side and then they pick up everything and they move it to the other side, and they move so fast and adjust all the heavy equipment with such coordination, it's just an incredible thing to watch."

Jackie Chan feels less pressure working on *The Forbidden Kingdom* and cites the reason, "The action sequences for this film has been a breeze for me. Normally, when I take on an action film as an actor, I will still be advising on the action choreography, directing the action and even

act as stunt coordinator. It was especially so in *Rush Hour*. Whenever I was in my trailer, they will walkie-talkie me and say that the director is looking for me. I don't get to rest. I have to practice my English dialogue, I have to train the people how to fight, I have to design the fighting sequences and teach people to do all the fighting sequences. In this case, because there is Wo Ping, I am totally relaxed and at ease. We have been working together since thirty years ago on films such as *Snake Eagle Shadow*, *Drunken Master*.”

Jet Li agrees and explains, "For movies such as *Fearless*, it is a very personal project so I will get involved in the story, the action choreography, the creative aspects. I demand more out of it in order to achieve my personal vision. But for *The Forbidden Kingdom*, I left it entirely to Wo Ping and his team whom I believe can do their jobs very well and complete the film's requirements, so I contribute less."

### **Pre-Production**

While it was quite a challenge for the producers to secure the two main leading stars and the action and photographic directors at the beginning, the more daunting challenge was for them, being Westerners, to plan and execute an entire film shoot in China.

Executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis relates, “The most difficult part was the short amount of preparation time we had. We had to do twice as much work in half as little time as you would normally have on such a film. It meant that we had to start filming while we were still figuring out how to film!”

Pre-production planning in China started before Chinese New Year in January 2007 for just four months before the 17-week long principal photography commenced on 2 May, 2007.

Producer Casey Silver continues, “By the time we were all strapped in and moving forward, there really wasn't as much time for the physical preparation of the movie as I wished we could have had. To create this film in such a different place, working in a different language, with a myriad country of crew and a million different way of doing things, I had great concern over actually getting there and doing it as we needed to do.”

But it all worked all once they arrived in China and started to piece all the elements together despite the hectic schedule and the sheer amount of preparation to complete.

“Actual pre-production was all of eight weeks, a really short time for a movie of this scale,” recalls director Rob Minkoff. Besides final script revisions, there were also the production design aspects for sets, props, weapons, costumes as well as location scouting. To do all that in such a short time is very unusual for China, much less to say, for us from Hollywood.

So we had to rush really fast to do it all. On top of all that, we needed to plan as much as possible to give Wo Ping a foundation on which to plan the fights on which was a crucial aspect at that point.”

Silver continues, “In retrospect, my anxiety was greater than it needed to be because everybody met us halfway. There was tremendous cooperation and energy put forth by people in front of and behind the camera; cooperation from the our partners in China, the Huayi Brothers, who were terribly helpful to us, and from the China Film Group, and everybody sort of saying ok to everything. So our experience here has been exceedingly blessed,” says Silver.

Another pre-production preparation was action training for the actors who are not martial arts trained which commenced a month prior to the start of shooting in Hengdian, China. Action choreographer-director Yuen Wo Ping and his team devised a training program that concentrated on multiple disciplines: fitness training, weapons training and martial arts fight training.

As Chinese actress Li Bingbing remembers, “It was extremely organized and systematic and we worked on a very water-tight schedule. We had to wake up, eat breakfast and travel to the training room according to the timetable.”

For actor Michael Angarano, he was impressed with how he was made equipped in a very short time. “I had never trained in martial arts before so this was my first time. They worked on my flexibility and my martial arts techniques but mostly, they were trying to teach my mind how to learn the choreography and how to adapt in fight situations better because we don't have a lot of time to film these scenes so it was important to be able to catch the strokes you have to execute fast.”

Horse riding, another important part of martial arts films, was also taught to the actors. First-time horse-rider Li Bingbing took it all in her stride. “In the movie I have to look good riding a horse as I am supposed to depict a highly skilled pugilist. Between fearing being thrown off by the horse and not looking like a novice rider, I was more concerned with the latter,” she laughingly admits.

Another one of the main challenges of the movie is that much of the dialogue spoken is English. Despite the daily English lessons for all the actors, Jackie Chan remained concerned about expressing the emotions of his part while articulating his lines in English. Director Rob Minkoff brushed his fears aside, and says, “Jackie has just done an amazing job, I think better than he has done in any other film before.”

It was also extremely important that the actors could realistically portray the action sequences involving flying. Hence, another area of training that they had to undergo was wire-hanging. “We have a lot of wire-hanging scenes so the training is essential to help us perform

our roles better,” concludes Li. She also learned archery in order to fulfill another skill requirement for her depiction of the character, the White Haired Demoness.

As for the other Chinese female lead actress Liu Yifei, her additional training involved learning to play the pipa, a Chinese string music instrument. Liu confesses, “Honestly, I do feel that the few weeks of training was still inadequate for me in terms of actually becoming the character of Golden Sparrow. However, I did learn a tremendous amount of action-fighting knowledge from the directors, especially from Yuen Wo Ping’s stunt team.”

A perfectionist at the tender age of nineteen, she continued with her own training after the first month. “In order to portray a warrior role authentically, you really need to have the power to fight and not just in posing. So, I go to the gym every morning before I start filming because I need to be physically strong as well,” professes Liu.

In summary on the pre-production work they had to do, Angarano says, “It was tough work lasting up to eight hours a day for every single day for three weeks but it is something I will never forget.”

All in all, it has taken a total of five years from inception of the story premise to its final production stages.

## **Location**

For executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis, making this film in China has been something in her calling. “I strongly believe that this film has been a culmination of many of my experiences making films: I had worked in China twenty-three years ago; I have done a lot of period films; a lot of martial arts films. And so, in a way, I think I was the perfect person to produce this film. It was like my life had prepared me for it.”

Going to China to complete the job of directing this fascinating project has also been very important to director Rob Minkoff who is American. “The story of the movie is almost an exact parallel of the story of the making of the movie. Just like the story, I am an American boy coming to China. When you think about it, we are working with the masters of kungfu cinema – Yuen Wo Ping, Peter Pau, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Like the boy Jason in the story, I am coming in brand new with this great love for Asian film and martial arts films. So to finally and actually make a movie with these masters and these incredible Asian superstars, to be here with them and through the process, and through the journey of the movie, it has been a personal journey for me as well.”

Actor Michael Angarano also shares the same sentiments, “The journey Jason goes

through in the film is definitely a parallel to the one that I went through making this movie here in China. I do not know if I have had quite the transformation that Jason has had but I definitely am going to come out of this movie not the same person I was when I came into it. That's for sure."

While much of *The Forbidden Kingdom* was created on the sound stages of Hengdian World Studios, numerous spectacular locations in China were chosen for exterior scenes: the Gobi desert in Dunhuang, the Nine Bends River, the waterfall at Xianju, the greens of Wuyi Mountains, the Bamboo Camp at Anji and the Plum Blossom Garden at Fangyan.

Producer Casey Silver acknowledges, "As was discussed with Executive Producer Raffaella de Laurentiis during the planning process, we thought it was extremely important that if we were coming all the way to make a movie about China, we had to make sure that we really saw China and show China to our audience. This movie is about a metaphorical hero's journey but the characters also make a long physical journey and I wanted to show the landscapes and visual imagery that would speak about the filmmakers' adventure being here as well, to the audience who sees the movie. And we did get the approval and support of the Chinese government, so it has been a very good experience."

After much exploration and traveling, executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis and production designer Bill Brzeski arrived at the specific locations that were crucial to the mood of the film. Brzeski describes the process, "We needed the whole of China crammed into all these locations so that the audience can partake in the experience of the long and difficult journey through desert, water, forest, mountains, jungles and other types of terrain and environments. All the hazards that take place at these locations then help to reinforce the heroes' strengths and their characters."

Minkoff concurs, "Before we started this movie, I had only seen these locations in some films and pictures. So the opportunity to go and actually see these magnificent places up close and in person was just unbelievable. Being such a huge country, China has vastly different landscapes, vistas and terrain. From the high deserts to the most incredible mountains and the lush greenery, it was really phenomenal. We wanted to go to so many more locations but we had to create a sensible location schedule for production."

Spanning four hundred and ninety thousand square miles and with constant sandstorms, the awe-inspiring Gobi desert was the first location that the film was shot. Asia's largest and also the world's fourth largest desert proved to be the most arduous location to access and to work in.

Angarano remembers vividly, "It was out of this world. The other places we were at were

like being in China but in the Gobi desert, it was like being on Mars. It was beautiful, and not even in my wildest dreams have I ever imagined that I could ever be in a place like this. That was a spectacular experience to me.”

Minkoff agrees, “The Gobi has got to be one of the most spectacular places I have ever been to. It is just out in the middle of nowhere literally, but it is breathtakingly beautiful. When you are there, you cannot help but think about the thousands of miles you are from anywhere. The desert just goes on and on for miles. It is pretty impressive and very powerful.”

For director of photography Peter Pau, it was a different case. He recalls, “Our principal photography in Dunhuang and Wuyi started on Golden Week which is holiday week for the entire China. It was a nightmare when tourists flooded the entire area, coupled with the fact that these locations had extremely narrow roads that made it really difficult to move the generators, and the camera and lighting equipment around. I had to start planning way ahead with the transportation department on the sequence of the trucks transporting these but it was still problematic during the shoot. Luckily, the weather remained lovely throughout.”

Filming in the Wuyi Mountains, listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1999, in the Southeast of China, is where Angarano reckons some of the most beautiful scenes in the movie took place. This was one of the major background locations that had been recommended by Pau who wanted it for the greenery. In one particularly memorable scene, Angarano sits below a beautiful four hundred feet high waterfall, attempting to learn kungfu, “I was in the middle of the scene when I realized that I was in a unique moment of my life doing something that not many people will get to experience in their lifetime. I have been in China for four weeks and there I was positioned in a horse stance, in the middle of a waterfall, in the midst of this rainforest up in this mountain range in China. It was completely surreal.”

The Nine Bends River with a scenic background of the majestic Wuyi Mountains seemed straight out of a Chinese ink brush painting. This is where a scene with the four protagonists on a raft was filmed. Pau adds, “Xianju is another beautiful location for streams and trees where we filmed in. We also went to the bamboo forest in Anji where I shot *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* with Ang Lee.”

Actress Li Bingbing is exceptionally proud to show off her country to the world. “It is difficult to visualize the history of our ancestors’ land from history books and photographs. Now, a global audience will be able to experience the vast landscapes of Dunhuang. When we were filming there, I wanted to absorb it all in and store the vision in my mind’s eyes but it was impossible. Such treasures should be shared with the world.”

More action sequences took place at the Plum Blossom Garden in Fangyan before the

crew finally settled down in Hengdian with three hundred and thirty hectares of ancient temples, houses, lakes, teahouses, gardens and even a full replication of the Forbidden City and a portion of the Great Wall of China.

A real location was utilized in one of the scenes whereby a village was to be burned down by soldiers. Minkoff remembers, "This was one of the biggest challenges we had. It was a standing set in a location not far from Hengdian. The plan was to literally pour gasoline over it, light it on fire and then we only had one chance to take the film, so we had all the cameras that the production could afford plus hundreds of extras and these burning huts. It was sort of unconventional. We probably would not do something like that in the States."

The blustering hot summer weather in June and July proved to be severely punishing on the actors. Actress Liu Yifei laments, "When we were filming in the Plum Blossom Forest, the weather turned really hot and I had to wear a leather jacket as part of my costume, carry my pipa which is no lightweight, and my weapon, and fight with the Jade Warriors." At its highest, the temperature was at forty-two degrees Celsius.

Summarizing everyone's feelings, executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis has this to add, "Filming in Hengdian has been an absolute adventure. The crew worked really hard and it has been one of the best filming experiences of my life."

### **Production and Costume Design**

Hollywood production designer Bill Brzeski, who has worked closely with director Rob Minkoff in his previous works, was supported by a production design team of more than twenty designers from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Korea, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and even Eastern Europe.

The production team had to conceptualize several studio sets at the renowned Hengdian World Studios in Zhejiang, China. Says producer Casey Silver, full of praise, "I had not been to China before the preparation of this movie but I have found Hengdian to be an incredible facility. Their stages are spectacular and we have been able to accomplish a size and a scope for the movie that I think otherwise we could not have afforded. It has been very film-friendly. I think both the Chinese crew and Hong Kong crew are extremely talented, hardworking and very committed. It has been truly a great experience so much so that when the other Hollywood studios call me and asked me how it has been because they are considering bringing projects here, I have been able to respond honestly that our experience has been really good, on schedule, on budget, the picture looks really good mad people have worked really hard."

“Despite the inconvenience of Hengdian’s location as a studio for foreign films, it is still one of the largest period setting studios in China. We were able to modify the Qin Palace in Hengdian into three big stages for the final fight sequences,” says director of photography Peter Pau. Films that have previously been filmed at Hengdian include director Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* and director Chen Kaige’s *The Promise*.

With the story set in modern day Boston and ancient China, it was crucial for the design team made up of mostly Asians to grasp the entirely different culture, history and setting of each set. “As the story does not take place in any reality, we did exhaustive research on classical China architecture and cultural style and then brought it to a fantasy level,” describes Brzeski. “Overall, we gave the film a Western sensibility in order to show that the story is being told visually from the point of view of Jason, who is a modern-day American teenager.”

In designing the Jade Warlord’s Throne Room, Fountain Room, the Eight Trigrams Furnace and the Armory Room, Brzeski could freely adapt from any era, and some of the motifs even look vaguely Eastern European. “The film is set in an era in China before the emergence of the Dynasties. Having interpreted it as a period before the emperors ruled the land, we could thus steal freely from all time periods,” professes Brzeski.

On the other hand, the Boston sets of Jason’s bedroom, the rooftop, the back alleys and the Chinese pawnshop interior and the street with the pawnshop store front were created by some of the Asian designers, who gamely admitted that they have never been to Boston, or the U.S. for that matter. With extensive detailing stemming from their research, they managed to create a stimulating blend of Boston inner city life with American Chinatown influences.

The difficulty to make the Boston sets lie in the fact that there were no Western artifacts the designers could draw upon in Hengdian where the art department was located. "In the end, we had to ship most of the props from America. I grew up in Boston so for me it was easy to visualize. For my Chinese counterparts, it was a bit more difficult but they all patiently took the time to learn what was necessary in order to give the movie an authentic look," says Brzeski.

In contrast to the Chinese landscape and sets of deep and rich colors, a gritty look was used for Boston. Peter Pau explains, “As a contrast, I modified the colour scheme for modern-day Boston to be somewhat cooler so that it will have a harsher and more contemporary feel.”

Sets set in ancient China included a monastery, a temple, the middle kingdom battlements and the main location set of Jade Warlord’s Palace which has its interior housed in the existing Qin Palace back lot. "Using the existing back lots as a shell, we could completely remold the interiors to our needs.

On the Chinese teahouse set located within the water village where an important and

lengthy action sequence was to take place involving many of the cast and more than two hundred extras, extensive discussions were necessitated with action choreographer Yuen Wo Ping and his team before the design could be finalized. This was to ensure that the action stunts could be developed and contained within the set. The two-storey construction included a pond and a landscaped garden with an air well right in the middle where wire-hanging stunts could take place.

Some European elements can be distinctly seen in the detailing of the Palace interior. No fewer than one hundred sets and prop builders worked day and night to complete the multiple and extensive sets and props which included the statue of the Monkey King and the three Palace hall interiors. “The Qin Palace was a set that was photographed for the movie *Hero*, a fantastic movie that I admire greatly. Bill was able to dress the same set to look differently and deliver a look that I think is very strong and simply great for the movie,” proclaims Silver.

Pau however did meet with some difficulties but were able to resolve them. He says, “It is impossible to hang any overheads in the Qin Palace so I had to design and pre-order the lighting grids for the lighting and the wires.” He reckons that it was possibly one of the largest and most difficult stages he has had to work with.

On the whole, the producers and directors were extremely pleased with the sets produced by Brzeski and his team despite the language barriers. “Working with multiple languages, cultures and design backgrounds made it easy for things to be misinterpreted but the team's work has been nothing short of fantastic,” concludes Brzeski.

Executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis sings her praises, “Bill has done such a great job with the sets, helped enormously by our talented Art Director from Hong Kong, Eric Lam. They built set after set under very difficult time constraints and their work was impeccable.”

Hong Kong designer Shirley Chan's costumes were designed with the characters' physicality and personalities in mind. The opulence of Jade Warlord's majestic robes portrayed his gravitation towards power and status. Ni Chang's overflowing robes with layering hid the Demoness' emotions from view. It also made her fighting moves a visual cacophony that works marvelously on screen, swirling white hair and cloth all over in mid-air. The four travelers had costumes that befitted their roles as the Drunken Master, a Silent Monk, an Orphaned Young Maiden and a Lost American Boy perfectly as well. Executive producer Raffaella De Laurentiis was especially taken with Chan's vision, “Her costumes were very imaginative and they give our film an epic, timeless quality.”

The wonderful sets, together with the taste and colors used in the exotic costumes that award-winning costume designer Shirley Chan brought to the film completed the design of the

movie and effected the grandeur and rich heritage that is China.

### **Action Sequences**

Jackie Chan believes that Yuen Wo Ping may have been under some pressure to design different sequences for he and Jet Li but he was totally confident that Yuen Wo Ping would deliver. What surprised Chan was that during the very first fight sequence that he and Jet Li had to perform, they hit upon something rare. "It was seamless. With most people, you have to practise. But with Jet, I don't know why, we both looked at each other and we just said, "Let's just do it, yeah" and we did it. He probably wanted to try how fast I am and I wanted to try how good he is. The first two takes were so fast that everybody had to tell us to slow down or they would have had to put the camera speed slower."

The chemistry between Chan and Li was a bonus to the entire film. "Mostly, when I fight with people, it will take ten to fifteen takes. Jet and I took three to five takes for our fights, that's all. All I do is tell Jet I will do these few strokes and let him know my rhythm. He then picks up my rhythm and just reacts with his strokes. It's not common. All these years, this sort of chemistry has only surfaced when I fight with Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao, nobody else. Jet is a professional just like me," says Chan.

For Michael Angarano, he has gained a whole new perspective for something he was not privy to before, "Now I feel very special about kungfu movies. Watching them and being in one are two very different things. I have always respected it but now, I really admire the people who make Chinese kungfu movies because there is so much hard work that goes into it."

"It is not just about fighting, but more like dancing. You have to be in tune with the person next to you, because if you are not in sync, then the fight is not going to work. That is something that Jet Li taught me. It is about performing and so much goes into that. Not only is it important how hard the person throws the punch, it matters how hard it looks like they are throwing it. It is also equally important that the person receiving the punch makes it look good, so it takes cooperation from both sides. I am really so honored that I have the opportunity to do something like this. It is an opportunity that not many people get and I think I realize that I have tried to do to the best of my ability to fulfill that opportunity," he continues.

Out of all the fight sequences that Angarano had to do, what he found most challenging was an intense fight scene with Jet Li. "We were depicting a scene where he is training me but the tempo and the speed at which we had the fight with these staffs was very fast and I did not want to let Jet down. That was really stressful," recalls Angarano.

Despite his lack of martial arts background, Angarano was a natural on set and even Jet Li is full of praise for him, “Michael is very smart and I am not the only one who thinks so. Wo Ping has also commented that Michael is able to grasp the action sequences very quickly. I think he has the talent to learn action movies and kungfu. Not many people can control their body well but he can do it.”

In return, Angarano has this to say about the action team, “Wo Ping and his team are such good teachers, they really do a great job of relating to you what you have to do. When there is something physically or mentally that you are not understanding quite well, they can see it and can pinpoint exactly what it is. Just by looking at a sequence once, they will have all the things that I was doing wrong down pat. Unbelievable.”

The two female actresses, Li Bingbing and Liu Yifei, have their own nuances in dealing with the expectations for the action sequences.

Bingbing laughs and relates her experience, “It was most frightening to fight with Yifei as we are both non-professionals and belong to the weaker sex. We cringe when we have to fight each other. It’s an innate reaction I suppose. For example, I will use very little strength to strangle Yifei. Then Wo Ping will stop me and say it doesn't look realistic and that I need to put in more strength. However, I am afraid that I might hurt her and she feels the same too. So I will apologize every time before I do it with more strength.”

Fighting Chan is less stressful according to Bingbing, “No matter how you fight, whether with the right or wrong moves, Jackie will be able to receive them and help you finish your strokes. If I strike too high or too low he will still be able to intercept and we can complete the sequence. So fighting with Jackie is the least worrying and the most fun. In fact, I actually look forward to it.”

For actress Liu, carrying a pipa while horse riding proved to be challenging, “The pipa was always hitting my head. So Jet took care of me, as he is more experienced with galloping fast on the horse. He would always turn around to see if I am alright even before his horse comes to a complete stop.” Jet Li also showed Liu the art of throwing darts with finesse while Chan would encourage her on if her fighting scenes with them suffered numerous retakes.

When it came to the large-scale finale scene in the film, it proved to be a massive coordination and designing effort to script the action sequences with hundreds of extras and the extensive and intensive action choreography for all the lead characters, especially the White-Haired Demoness. The uncontrollable factors in such a long scene escalate in numbers and the finale fighting took almost a month to complete. The sweltering heat of over forty degrees Celsius did not help the entire process. The actors felt drained even before they lifted up their

heavy weapons and makeup artists were kept busy constantly touching up the melting makeup.

Bingbing laughingly says, “No matter what, I still have to be cool and fight with the most zest. I have to believe and show that I am the most highly skilled fighter in the kingdom. I have to be in the best state but I have to control my perspiration.”

Injuries in action movies are real and unavoidable. Bingbing and Jet Li had bad scratches on their arms and palms from hanging off fake rock surfaces. Bruises were constant sore points covered up by costumes. Chan and Bingbing both hurt their backs filming the finale battlement scene through extensive backbreaking wire-hanging and flying.

But despite all these, the actors only have positive things to say about filming the action sequences for this epic.

Actor Collin Chou, who has worked with Yuen Wo Ping countless times including in *Fearless* and *The Matrix* comments, “There is always something new that he will bring to a film so it is always a pleasure and a breath of fresh air to work with he and his team. For the Jade Warlord character that I play, he has created some excellent action choreography. I really enjoy doing the stunts for Wo Ping every time.”

First-time action actress Liu is also a huge fan of Yuen Wo Ping’s work. She says, “I am delighted to be able to work with Wo Ping as I like all his films including *Kill Bill*, *The Matrix* and *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. So working with him, and with Jackie and Jet gives me a lot of opportunities to improve myself.

## **Martial Arts**

When most screenwriters reach the fighting scenes, they usually write, “And now they fight.” Screenwriter John Fusco went much further: he scripted the exact kungfu moves he envisioned onto the script pages, and this was for one of the most successful and influential action directors in the history of Hong Kong cinema, if not the world. But Yuen Wo Ping respected Fusco’s interpretation and used his suggestions as jumping-off points when he choreographed the fighting styles for the characters.

Some styles that Fusco had designated for the characters were essential to the story, like Monkey Kung Fu for the Monkey King and Drunken Fist for Lu Yan. Yuen then assigned signature martial systems to others: Phoenix Dancing in Ninth Heaven for the villain Ni-Chang is one example.

One of the first conversations director Rob Minkoff had with Yuen Wo Ping was to put across the idea of incorporating different styles of martial arts in the film. “We have street

fighting style, and then we have wire-flying, and then we have Qi Magic. So there are different types and levels of fighting, choreography and sensibility," says Minkoff. It was something that had not been done before and Yuen Wo Ping was agreeable to trying this out.

The different martial arts and fighting styles showcased in *The Forbidden Kingdom* span from Shandong Black Tiger to Praying Mantis, Snake Fist, Leopard Style, Crane Boxing, Tiger Claw, Willow Leaf Palm, Eagle Claw and the Seeking Leg style.

Moving on, there is also fist fighting, swordplay and stick fighting.

Weapons used include poisonous arrows, the Crescent Moon sword for the evil Jade Warlord, butterfly knives and lethal darts for Golden Sparrow, moving on to monk cudgels to deer hook swords, spears, whips, and even the hair of the White-Haired Demoness.

To see how this all fits in, in an ambitious fight scene in a plum blossom orchard in Fang Yan, you will see Michael Angarano wielding his staff against attacking soldiers while Jet Li uses his sash as a weapon on the left, with Jackie Chan doing Hung Gar to his right.

## **Visual Effects**

For a movie like *The Forbidden Kingdom* with fantasy and supernatural elements set in a mythical time, there are around eight hundred visual effects scenes that need to be constructed, reduced from an original nine hundred over scenes.

Senior visual effects supervisor, Ron Simonson explains, "In such a film, the type of visual effects scenes vary greatly, encompassing 3D virtual backgrounds, matte paintings, complete 3D environments, 3D weapons and effects such as fire, water, lava, smoke and debris, 3D digital character doubles and 3D face replacements."

The visual effects are being completed in three places: Seoul, Hong Kong and Los Angeles. A large portion of the work is done in Korea, divided up between three facilities there. This pioneer collaboration with Korean visual effects houses assembled specifically for the movie: Macrograph, Inc., Digital Tetra Inc. (DTI) and Footage will be the first time that a non-Korean film with a complex and ambitious special effects profile will undergo post-production work in South Korea, a market that in the last decade has seen a rapid expansion of its filmmaking capabilities.

Working on such a big scale global film is a dream come true for the three companies. "Macrograph's goal has always been to become a global CGI house," says Dr. Inho Lee, the CEO of Macrograph while the CEO of DTI, Yoon Suk Lee continues, "and DTI Pictures has always dreamt of working on such a major project."

Producer Casey Silver reasons, "It is a combination of their qualitative talent and the quality of their work. We really wanted to make an authentic Asian movie to the highest degree that we could. Having already utilized a world-class Asian cast and crew, it only made sense to include this Asian sensitivity into the visual effects as well. When you are great at what you do, it transcends whether you are Asian or Western."

Work started on the visual effects back in February 2007 and was ramped up during production with three artists on hand in China to develop the pre-visualization and animatics that are used to develop the CGI shots and aid in shooting the practical elements.

Post photography, Macrograph, the main vendor in Korea, manages the bulk of the 3D work while DTI while Footage does most of the 2D work. The bulk of the wire removal work is done in Hong Kong and some 3D environment work, face replacements and wire removals are being handled in Los Angeles.

Simonson targets to complete all visual effects work only after eleven months of preparation and hard work. He explains further, "There are a number of shots in the movie that are a hundred percent CGI. These include many of the establishing shots of the Jade Warlord's palace and another important scene setting - the Five Elements Mountain."

Another scene depicted in visual effects is the Peach Banquet, which was a total fantasy set and the inspiration was to make it seem like a heaven on earth. The Monkey King appears both at the Peach Banquet and in the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. Suitably, these two backgrounds are completely computer-generated. In the case of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, the only practical elements in the shot are the characters and just the tips of three rocks.

*The Forbidden Kingdom* represents a watershed moment for the South Korean film industry, which is poised to take on more Hollywood-based projects. "Being a part of an international production of this scale will help to further develop the company," concludes Tae Jung Han, the President of Footage.

Slated to be completed by January 2008, the final visual effects will not only show how visionary the filmmakers are, it will also show just how advanced the Korean visual effects houses are. "Korea is on the cutting edge of media in Asia, so I am excited to see this team work their magic," sums up director Rob Minkoff.

## ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

### **Jason Tripitikas (Michael Angarano)**

When we first meet Jason Tripitikas in the movie, he is a teenage boy in Boston, in contemporary America, who is obsessed with martial arts and Chinese popular culture. Idolizing Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li and Chinese kungfu cinema, he ends up finding the staff of the Monkey King in a Chinatown pawnshop and gets transported to ancient China on a mission to return the weapon to the Sage himself.

"This is a kid who does not stand up for himself or follows the ways of his mentors. Instead, he lives vicariously through them in the films that he watches. When the staff transports him to this new world and he goes on this journey and meets these people who changes him, that transformation and that journey that he goes through is exactly what I can relate to," explains Michael Angarano.

In yet another coincidence between Jason and his parallel universe as found in the Chinese kungfu movies he obsesses in, Jackie Chan observes, "Jason reminds me exactly of Yuen Xiao-tian, the young kungfu novice character I played in *Drunken Master*."

### **Lu Yan and Old Hop (Jackie Chan)**

Lu Yan is like the Drunken Master in his carefree take on life and his drinking habit. When he encounters Jason and reluctantly becomes his bodyguard, escort and kungfu teacher, the never serious Lu Yan shows his martial arts skills and his relentless honor and humor. Lu Yan bears strong character resemblance to a few of the Eight Immortals as according to the Chinese Taoist legends.

As for the old Chinese pawnshop owner named Old Hop, whose shop Jason frequents back in Boston, Jackie Chan has this to say, "Those were my favorite scenes. I was imitating Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* - in both the way he talks and walks but added in a little Jackie Chan style." Chan was never told Old Hop's age so he continued to interpret the character as he saw fit with no objection from the director. His main gripe was with the heavy layers of makeup to age his face and body.

"Throughout the entire day, I did not want to eat or talk because the makeup makes you so easily frustrated." Taking seven hours to put on and another two hours to remove, Chan found the process extremely challenging on his patience. "Sitting there at 5am while the makeup artist swipes glue on to your face like how you spread honey onto a pancake. It was pure torture. So I really admire actors like John Travolta, who puts the suits and makeup onto his entire body."

### **Silent Monk and The Monkey King (Jet Li)**

When Jet Li heard that he could take on the role of the Monkey King, he was instantly keen, having never played this beloved legendary character ever in his career. However, the five and a half hours of makeup that will ensue almost frightened him off. Li confessed, "I became afraid and almost said no because I was not sure how I will be able to act and fight in the whole getup." So after much discussion with director Rob Minkoff and producer Casey Silver bouncing off ideas with the art and costume department, the image of the Monkey King was re-created, much to Li's relief. Makeup time was drastically reduced to three hours.

The Monkey King had been written into the film with a mere twenty minutes screen time. Thus, in order not to waste the precious resource that is Jet Li, a key spin-off character from the Monkey King was incorporated – the Silent Monk, who essentially became one of the Monkey King's seventy-two transformations.

The Silent Monk proceeds to stoically escort Jason on the rest of his journey to return the staff and to free the Monkey King. Both are quintessentially the ideal imagery roles for Li who delightedly emphasized, "I made this movie for my children."

### **Golden Sparrow (Liu Yifei)**

Golden Sparrow is an orphan whose only care in the world is to seek revenge on the Jade Warlord for killing off her parents. Skilled in martial arts, her main weapon is the dart. While masquerading as a pipa player in the teahouse, Golden Sparrow comes to the aid of Jason and Lu Yan as they tried to fend off some Jade Warriors who were eyeing the bo staff. Upon realizing that they were also on the same journey heading towards the Jade Warlord's Palace, she decides to join them, realizing that there will be more safety in numbers.

"Hers is a very complete story with her past, her present and her destiny in full view and resolved at the end of the film. This gives me a lot of room to play in acting out the role of Golden Sparrow," cites actress Liu Yifei. As Golden Sparrow starts to develop feelings for Jason, the emotional breadth of the character is further broadened. Liu comments, "I think the audience will feel for her pitiful background and for her love story. Her strong personality and her vulnerabilities make her a likeable character and I am so lucky to have been given the chance to play Golden Sparrow, the only heroine in *The Forbidden Kingdom*."

### **Ni Chang/White-Haired Demoness (Li Bingbing)**

In another parallel of sorts, it is timely and justified that director of photography Peter

Pau was the one who suggested including the White-Haired Demoness into the screenplay of *The Forbidden Kingdom*, because in 1993, Pau was the director of photography for *The Bride With White Hair*, a Hong Kong feature film based on the martial arts novel of the same name.

Originally, the role of the martial arts expert was to be a male character. When Pau coolly proposed that they adopt the White-Haired Demoness, Ni Chang instead, the producers and writer Fusco did not hesitate to take up the apt suggestion.

In her earlier attempts to leave her sect for her lover, Ni Chang suffered through extreme tortures imposed by her master. Thus, in the instant that she realized that her lover had betrayed her, her anger turned her whole head of hair white. Already a highly skilled pugilist from young, trained by her evil master to do his dirty deeds, Ni Chang's plight spawned her ruthlessness towards all men, especially those who are too weak to fight against her.

In *The Forbidden Kingdom*, the Jade Warlord entrusts Ni Chang to help him retrieve the Monkey King's bo staff, which has reappeared in the Middle Kingdom in exchange for whatever, that she wants. The embittered Ni Chang thus accepts the mission in return for the elixir to regain her youth and immortality.

As according to actress Li Bingbing who portrays Ni Chang, the White-Haired Demoness, she can be seen to be more of a victim than a villain. "I must say I only have sympathy for this character. She suffered the ultimate betrayal at the hands of her most trusted lover. Hence, she now has no more regard for men. While she may kill to reach her goals, I feel she is merely being extremely focused, but the audience may find her cold-blooded. Being highly skilled in fighting causes everyone to be fearful of her but it is not something that she can change," Li touts.

In the film, Ni Chang gets to fight with every other main character using weapons like a whip, bow and arrow and her hair. The action sequences for Ni Chang, specially designed by Yuen Wo Ping and his team, are some of the most thrilling scenes to behold.

### **Jade Warlord (Collin Chou)**

As actor Collin Chou correctly pointed out, the Jade Warlord is not necessary an evil character. He merely tries to keep the kingdom in order. So when characters that he considers unruly or who opposes him appear, he will not hesitate to remove them or teach them a lesson, just like how he taught the Monkey King a lesson by imprisoning him in stone for five centuries.

Upon knowing that the bo staff, which will be able to free the Monkey King, has reappeared, the Jade Warlord turns desperate. He sends the White-Haired Demoness after it to prevent the staff from reaching the Monkey King.

## ABOUT THE CAST

### **Jackie Chan (as Lu Yan and Old Hop)**

Born in Hong Kong on April 7, 1954, Jackie Chan was enrolled in the China Drama Academy at age 7 where he spent the next 10 years training in the art of Peking Opera and learned the acrobatics, martial arts, acting, and singing that would later help him become an international superstar.

When Chan left the Academy at the age of 17 to pursue stunt work over the gradually fading Peking Opera industry, he gained a reputation as a talented and fearless stuntman. Within a few years, he was acting, directing, and choreographing stunts for dozens of films. In 1978, the films *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master* were the first to showcase Chan's genre of action comedy, which transformed the Hong Kong film industry. Two years later, Chan made his major feature film directorial debut on *The Young Master*, which marked the start of his long association with producer Raymond Chow, whose Golden Harvest Company made many of Chan's subsequent films.

After a series of attempts in the 1980s to break into the American movie market, Chan returned to Hong Kong to focus on making films in his hometown. He was extremely successful and his film credits in the 1980s includes *Supercop*, *First Strike*, *Police Story* series and *The Accidental Spy* to name only a few.

In 1995, he returned to the US to film *Rumble in the Bronx* and it was a huge hit when released in 1996. Since then, Chan has starred in a succession of American productions, including the blockbuster *Rush Hour* series with Chris Tucker and director Brett Ratner, as well as the hit action comedy *Western*, *Shanghai Noon*, followed by its sequel, *Shanghai Knights* which Chan also executive produced. Other box office successes include the film *Highlanders*, *The Tuxedo* and a remake of the classic, *Around the World in 80 Days*.

Over his nearly four-decade film career, Chan has received hundreds of awards for his acting, directing, writing, and stunt work. The numerous honors include a Lifetime Achievement Award from the MTV Movie Awards, which was presented to him by Quentin Tarantino in 1995; the Actor of the Year Award at the 1999 Hollywood Film Festival; two Best Actor Awards at the Golden Horse Film Festival; three Hong Kong Film Awards; two additional MTV Movie Awards; a Taurus Honorary Award at the World Stunt Awards and an Innovator Award from the American Choreography Awards in 2002, and most recently, a Special Jury Award at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival as well as an Outstanding Contribution to Chinese Cinema Award at the Shanghai International Film Festival in 2005.

For the past 20 years, Chan has devoted much of his spare time and energy to charity work. In 1988, he established the Jackie Chan Charitable Foundation and has since worked tirelessly for dozens of charities both at home and abroad. In recent years, he has focused his energies on his Dragon's Heart Foundation, which builds schools in remote areas of China. Among his many charitable endeavors, he is a Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF/UNAIDS, a celebrity cabinet member of the American Red Cross, founder of the Jackie Chan Civil Aviation Foundation in China, and has hosted charity concerts and car races for many years.

As Chan continues to make Asian blockbuster films like *The Myth*, *Rob-B-Hood* and *New Police Story* in his native Hong Kong, he is also lending his voice to Master Monkey, a strong, agile and dedicated kung fu warrior in *Kung Fu Panda*, a 2008 animation feature by DreamWorks Animation.

### **Jet Li (as Silent Monk and The Monkey King)**

Born in Beijing, Li began studying the art of *wushu* (the general Chinese term for martial arts) at the young age of 8. After three years of extensive training, Li won his first national championship for the Beijing Wushu Team. Li's celebrity status in China was so great, the government selected him to represent the country in over 45 countries, performing martial arts at various state functions. The most historically notable was his 1974 performance on the lawn of the Whitehouse for President Richard Nixon, after the President had just reopened American diplomatic relations with China. For the next five years (1974 -1979), he remained the All-Around National Wushu Champion of China.

Shortly after retiring from the sport at the age of 17, Li was offered many starring roles and subsequently began his film career with director Chang Hsin Yen for *Shaolin Temple*. The success of *Shaolin Temple* propelled Li from a martial arts master to a full-fledged Chinese movie star and an overnight celebrity. His star shone so bright that almost any picture with his name attached became an instant success. *Kids From Shaolin* and *Martial Arts of Shaolin*, Li's second and third films respectively, also enjoyed box-office success. He completed 25 successful Asian films before his crossover to America.

Since his first English-language film appearance as the villain in *Lethal Weapon 4* opposite Mel Gibson, Li has appeared in films like *Romeo Must Die*, *The One*, *Kiss of the Dragon*, and *Hero*.

After *Hero*, Li worked on projects such as *Cradle 2 the Grave* and *Unleashed* co-starring Morgan Freeman and Bob Hoskins. In 2005, Li began work on what he said was the culmination of his life-long experience with martial arts -- *Fearless*, directed by Ronny Yu. The film has

received both box office and critical success in Asia and around the world, including a "Best Actor" award from the Hong Kong Film Critics Association.

Following the release of *Fearless*, in 2007, Li completed work on *War* (aka *Rogue*) with Jason Statham and the Chinese-language film *Tou Ming Zhuang* (known in English as *The Warlords*) with Andy Lau and Takeshi Kaneshiro.

Li has also extended his fame to charitable causes. Already a Red Cross ambassador, Li recently spearheaded and founded the Red Cross Society of China Jet Li One Foundation Project (One Foundation), a foundation whose goal is to provide counseling to victims of natural disasters and to help young people cope with mental health and psychological issues. His hope is to get "each person to donate at least one dollar each month so as to combine our charitable strength to help the most vulnerable members of our global family".

Li will next be starring in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* in 2008.

### **Michael A. Angarano (as Jason Tripitikas)**

One of the most gifted actors of his generation, Michael Angarano is making his mark in Hollywood with a diversity of roles that defines him as one of the industry's most respected and sought after young actors.

Angarano will next be seen in Michael Schroeder's *Man in the Chair* opposite Christopher Plummer. The film premiered at the 2007 Santa Barbara Film Festival and was recipient of the American Spirit Award, it was also premiered at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival. Angarano will also star in David Gordon Green's *Snow Angels* opposite Sam Rockwell and Kate Beckingsale. *Snow Angels* premiered in competition at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Gene Seymour from NEWSDAY wrote of Angarano's performance, "Angarano shows the kind of shambling charisma that gave the late Walter Matthau a long and lucrative career. Finding such small gems in unlikely settings is what one really comes to Sundance for." Additionally, Angarano will be seen in David Evans *The Final Season* starring opposite Sean Astin and Rachael Leigh Cook.

Angarano made his breakthrough performance in Wes Craven's *Music of the Heart* opposite Meryl Streep. Shortly after, he starred in Cameron Crowe's Academy Award nominated film *Almost Famous* opposite Francis McDormand, Kate Hudson, Billy Crudup, Zooey Deschanel and Patrick Fugit. Angarano's other film credits include Catherine Hardwicke's *Lords of Dogtown* opposite Heath Ledger and Emile Hirsch, Mike Mitchell's *Sky High* opposite Kurt Russell and Kelly Preston, Alex Steyermark's *One Last Thing* opposite Cynthia Nixon, Thomas Vinterberg's *Dear Wendy*, and Gary Ross' *Seabiscuit* opposite Tobey Maguire and Jeff

Bridges.

On television, Angarano recently appeared in a four-episode arc on Fox's hit drama *24* opposite Kiefer Sutherland. He also guest starred on NBC's Emmy winning comedy *Will and Grace* as Elliot, Jack McFarland's (Sean Hayes) son. Angarano's other television credits include *E.R.*, *CSI*, *Less Than Perfect*, *Summerland*, and *Kevin Hill*.

Angarano was born in Brooklyn, New York and currently resides in Los Angeles.

### **Liu Yifei (as Golden Sparrow)**

Borne in Wuhan, Hubei province of China, Liu Yifei has shown great artistic talent since young. She began modeling at the age of 8 and was trained in singing, dancing and the piano. Moving to the United States in 1998 with her mother, Liu lived there for four years. She returned to China in June 2002 to pursue a modeling and acting career.

In September 2002, she was accepted into the Performance Institute of Beijing Film Academy at the tender age of 15. Immediately following her admittance into Beijing Film Academy, Liu received numerous offers to star in various television drama serials. Her first television role was in *The Story of a Noble Family*. Shortly after, she was chosen to portray the role of Wang Yuyan in *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, a drama based on the same-titled novel by the acclaimed martial arts writer, Jinyong. With this role, Liu's fame rose to unprecedented levels and her popularity with the Chinese audience also increased accordingly.

In October 2003, Liu marked her first appearance on the big screen collaboration with May Day, the well-known Taiwanese rock band in the movie *Love Of May*. Her fame and popularity went up another notch through her starring role in the 2004 drama series adaptation of the video game, *The Legend of Sword and Fairy*.

Upon her graduation from the Beijing Film Academy in July 2006, Liu starred in another television production based on another book by Jinyong, *The Return of the Condor Heroes*. This TV series was very well received in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan and helped Liu establish her reputation and popularity overseas.

Liu made her first foray into her music career in August 2005 when she secured a recording contract with Sony Music Entertainment Japan. After taking up singing and dancing lessons for a year, her album *Liu Yifei* was released regionally in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and throughout South-East Asia in August 2006, featuring a diverse music repertoire including rap and soft rock. In the same year, Liu also released her Japanese album in which the single, *The Gate of Late Night*, was chosen to be the theme for an animation series by Tokyo TV.

### **Li Bingbing (as Ni Chang, the White-Haired Demoness)**

Li Bingbing graduated from Shanghai Theatre Academy, majoring in drama. A professional actress for 10 years, she achieved stardom not overnight but through hard work. As such, Li strongly believes that although one's ability might be limited, hard work is limitless.

In 2000, Li won the Best Actress Award at the 13<sup>th</sup> Singapore International Film Festival with her role in Zhang Yuan's film, *Seventeen Years*. In 2001, Li starred in a TV series *Young Baoqingtian*, which propelled her to become one of the most famous actresses in China. That year she was awarded the title of one of the "Top Ten Best TV actors/actresses in China".

From then on, Li was approbated as an "action actress". Her film roles increased and she was cast in Hong Kong director Johnnie To's *Love for All Seasons* and Jingle Ma's *Silver Hawk*, a Hong Kong and Hollywood co-production. In *Silver Hawk*, Li played a merciless killer, acting with Michelle Yeoh.

Not satisfied with being an "action actress", Li starred in a small film *Waiting Alone* in 2004, in which she played a pure, kind-hearted and beautiful girl. That same year, Li won the title of "The Most Popular Actress" at the 12<sup>th</sup> Beijing College Film Festival. She went on to star in China director Feng Xiaogang's *A World Without Thieves*, followed by *Wait 'Til You're Older* also with Hong Kong actor Andy Lau.

In 2006, Li's performance in the film by famous director Yin Li - *The Knot*, earned her the acclaim of the critics and she was awarded the Best Actress at the Chinese Huabiao Award in 2007, the most prestigious official film award in mainland China, for her role in the movie. *The Knot* is also China's entry for the Best Foreign Film award at the 2008 Academy Awards®.

Next on her plate will be a role in Hong Kong director Johnnie To's first romantic film, as opposed to the police and triad features he is renowned for.

### **Collin Chou (as Jade Warlord)**

Born in Taiwan in 1967, Collin Chou began training martial arts at the age of 5 years old. At the age of 12, he began performing stunts on film shoots and landed his first leading role at the age of 18. After serving the military, he headed to Hong Kong to pursue his acting career.

In Hong Kong, Chou was quickly snapped up by top action director Sammo Hung, who signed him to his Stuntmen Team. He stayed for seven years, appearing in films including the Chinese swordplay classic *The Blade of Fury*. Since then, Chou has appeared in more than 30 feature films for prominent action directors including Yuen Wo Ping, Corey Yuen and Tsui Hark, and acted with international superstars Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh.

In 1994, Chou appeared as Jet Li's nemesis in *The Defender*. The two collaborated

another three times before Chou moved to Los Angeles in 1999 to pursue a higher education. While attending College, he was invited to star as the enigmatic Seraph in the cult hits *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*.

Chou became a Hollywood sensation overnight. Since then, he has lent his voice to the video game adaptations of the Matrix Trilogy, as well as been in several independent films such as *The Duel* and *American Fusion*, starring Esai Morales and Sylvia Chang. In the past two years, he has starred in films such as *Fearless* (again with Jet Li) and *D.O.A (Dear or Alive)* by Corey Yuen, released theatrically by Dimension Films in 2007.

Most recently, Chou starred in the Hong Kong/China action flick *Flashpoint* by Wilson Yip, which created an impact in the Asian market and is currently in discussions with several other Hollywood companies on upcoming features.

Chou lives with his wife and two sons in Los Angeles and speaks three different languages.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **Casey Silver (Producer)**

Former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Universal Pictures, Casey Silver started Casey Silver Productions in October 1999.

In his role at Universal, Silver was responsible for all divisions of Universal Pictures, including its production, marketing and distribution operations. He supervised all activities worldwide concerning Universal's partnerships with United International Pictures and domestic distribution activities through its partnership with October Films.

Additionally, Silver oversaw Universal Studios Home Video, Universal Pictures Animation and Visual Effects and Universal Family & Home Entertainment Production, which include Universal Cartoon Studios.

During his tenure at Universal, the studio developed, produced and released the critically acclaimed films *Schindler's List*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Apollo 13*, *Babe*, *Jurassic Park*, *Out of Sight*, *Field of Dreams*, *The Nutty Professor*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Casper*, *In the Name of the Father*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Scent of a Woman*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Cape Fear*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Parenthood*, *Midnight Run*, *The Mummy*, *American Pie*, *Liar, Liar*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *Gladiator*.

Silver began his career in the motion picture industry as a screenwriter. After serving as assistant to director Adrian Lyne on *Flashdance*, he became director of development and production for Simpson-Bruckheimer Productions, where he was instrumental in the development of the original *Beverly Hills Cop*. Prior to joining Universal, he served for several years as TriStar Picture's vice president of production, and was then promoted to senior vice president of production.

In 2004, Silver and The Walt Disney Studios released the action-drama *Ladder 49*, starring Joaquin Phoenix and John Travolta and the epic *Hidalgo*, starring Viggo Mortensen (*Lord of the Rings*) and Omar Sharif.

Silver is also in post-production on *Leatherheads*, which he is producing for Universal Studios. George Clooney is directing and also starring in this film alongside Renee Zellweger. It is slated for release in Spring 2008.

### **Rob Minkoff (Director)**

Rob Minkoff began his career at Hollywood studios Amblin and Disney where he swiftly amassed a background in animation, design, story development and direction before co-directing the groundbreaking animated feature, *The Lion King*.

Prior to this commercial and artistic triumph, Minkoff was best known for directing the first two Roger Rabbit shorts, *Tummy Trouble* and *Roller Coaster Rabbit*. He also executive produced and provided the story for Roger's third outing, *Trail Mix Up*. Though Minkoff had dreamed of working for Disney since childhood, these antic shorts also reveal the loony influence of legendary Warner Bros. director Chuck Jones, Minkoff's mentor since his first year in the animation program at CalArts.

Minkoff made his live action directorial debut with the CGI effects family film *Stuart Little* for Columbia Pictures. He has since directed its sequel *Stuart Little 2* and the Disney family comedy *The Haunted House* starring Eddie Murphy. He is currently developing the popular Jay Ward property *Peabody and Sherman* for DreamWorks.

### **John Fusco (Screenwriter)**

Although born in Waterbury, Connecticut, John Fusco left home at 16 years old to travel the American South in search of authentic Delta blues music. He composed original songs and performed in road bands until he was 21 when he returned to night school and received his GED. Intent on pursuing his first love of dramatic writing, Fusco was accepted into NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. His first two student screenplays won national awards, the second becoming

the 1986 Delta blues cult film *Crossroads*.

Fusco would then go on to write the box office hit *Young Guns* (1988) and its sequel *Young Guns II* (1990). His deep interest in Native American subject matter would lead to his writing *Thunderheart* (1992), the Academy Award-nominated *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* (2000), the ABC mini-series *Dreamkeeper* (2003), and the Arabian horse race adventure *Hidalgo* (2004) for which he received the Spur Award from the Western Writers of America.

Fusco also wrote the novel "Paradise Salvage" (Simon and Schuster), a multi-generational coming-of-age tale that has been published in seven countries.

No stranger to stories that explore cultural myths and legend, it is no surprise that Fusco's childhood love of Chinese culture and martial arts has found its way into his most recent original script, *The Forbidden Kingdom*. Fusco began studying Korean martial arts when he was 12 years old, a year before the "Kung Fu TV" series and the films of Bruce Lee would create an explosion of martial arts popularity in the U.S. While always more interested in the philosophical side of martial art, Fusco longed to study Chinese kungfu but could not find the authentic art until 7 years ago when he began studying Northern Shaolin Kungfu with a *sifu* in the U.S.. He has since studied in China with Shifu Yi Shen Guo.

Fusco's next projects include *Wolf Brother*, his adaptation of the popular young adult novel for Ridley Scott, a contemporary remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* for the Weinstein Co. and a new original screenplay *The Cage*, set in the world of Mixed Martial Arts.

He lives on a farm with his wife and son in Northern Vermont.

### **Ryan Kavanaugh (Executive Producer)**

Ryan Kavanaugh is the founder, CEO and a principal of Relativity Media, LLC, a financing, consulting and production company that structures slate financing for both major studios and independent production entities as well as produces and finances its own productions. According to Seth Lubov of Bloomberg News, "Kavanaugh is one of the pre-eminent middlemen between hedge funds and Hollywood." Having created structures that have financed \$7 billion of total film production budgets to date, Kavanaugh is credited with establishing and growing the recent wave of structured finance off balance sheet transactions within the filmed entertainment marketplace.

In 2004 Kavanaugh created and implemented a first of its kind structure for Marvel Entertainment, which was later named structured finance deal of the year, and was provided an investment grade rating and wrapped by Ambak. Prior to that, Kavanaugh wrote the business plan for French distributor Exception Wild Bunch, created their financial structures and raised

both their production and operating capital. Exception today is one of the largest foreign sales companies and French distributors, having done over two hundred films including *Sin City* and the recent *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Kavanaugh also introduced the first "hedge fund capital" to the filmed entertainment marketplace through a \$525 million transaction with Warner Brothers. Since then, he has been responsible for creating first of their type transactions with Sony and Universal. In its most recent deal with Sony, Relativity will finance a minimum of 45 pictures (which Kavanaugh will also executive produce) over the next 5 years. Relativity has deals with virtually every studio (either single picture or slate deals) including: Sony, Universal, MGM, Warner Brothers, Paramount, The Weinstein Company and Lionsgate.

Kavanaugh has produced (or financed) over 35 major feature films, including *Talladega Nights*, *Ghost Rider*, *Pursuit Of Happyness*, *300*, *Holiday*, *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*, *3:10 to Yuma* (staring Russel Crow and Christian Bale), *American Gangster* (staring Denzel Washington and Russel Crow), *The Forbidden Kingdom* (marking the first time Jackie Chan and Jet Li will be fighting each other in a feature film) and *Zohan* (the new Adam Sandler film) to name a few.

Jill Goldsmith of Variety wrote of Kavanaugh, "His co-financing deals are the most successful ever in Hollywood. He's been amazingly proactive, and is the envy of many on Wall Street involved in the business." Details Magazine this year named him the twenty-sixth most influential man under forty-two and said Kavanaugh "is literally saving Hollywood's ass".

Amy Wallace of Portfolio magazine recently wrote, "Hollywood and Vine will always be the most famous corner in the history of the film business. But the future of movies is now being constructed at an imaginary intersection: Hollywood and Wall Street. At this crossroads, no one directs more traffic than Ryan Kavanaugh...in fact, Kavanaugh is Los Angeles' answer to Gordon Gekko, the corporate raider at the centre of Wall Street, one of his favourite movies. Like Gekko, Kavanaugh is quick-witted and relentless, and believes devoutly in the primacy of making money.

In 2002, Kavanaugh formed Relativity Management, which managed such high profile clients as Steven Soderbergh, George Clooney's Section 8 Productions, and Robert Evans. The company had ten managers and boasted over two hundred clients.

Prior to his work with Relativity, at the age of 22, Kavanaugh started a venture capital company, which raised and invested over \$400 million of equity in a number of venture and private equity transactions.

### **Raffaella De Laurentiis (Executive Producer)**

The daughter of legendary filmmaker Dino De Laurentiis and the highly acclaimed Italian actress Silvana Mangano, Raffaella grew up surrounded by the film business. Knowing early on that she wanted to be a producer, her father hired her at 15 as an assistant in props and set dressing on one of his films. He knew that if she was serious about her career aspirations, she must understand the function of each position on a film set.

From there she rose rapidly, working on Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig*, a period tale of a mad Bavarian king that starred her mother, Helmut Bergher, and Romy Schneider, as well as *Hurricane*, her father's epic film that involved building massive sets and accommodations in Tahiti. The intensive production experience led to her next film *Beyond The Reef*, filmed also in Tahiti utilizing the same sets and new hotel and marked her first credit as a producer.

In 1981, De Laurentiis produced the highly successful *Conan The Barbarian* for Universal, which launched the acting career of Arnold Schwarzenegger and 4 years later, made the sequel, *Conan The Destroyer*. Other credits for the talented producer include David Lynch's *Dune*, shot in Mexico City, and *Tai-Pan*, the first American film to be made in China. Following *Tai-Pan*, she spent about 18 months as head of production at the De Laurentiis Entertainment Group. During that period, De Laurentiis supervised numerous films for D.E.G., such as *Weeds*, *Crimes Of The Heart*, *Hiding Out*, *Earth Girls Are Easy* and *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure*.

Eager to get back to "hands-on" production work, De Laurentiis formed Raffaella Productions in 1987, producing *Prancer*, *Time Bomb* and *Trading Mom* with Sissy Spacek and Anna Chlumsky.

When she made *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* in 1993, it marked the beginning of her association with director Rob Cohen and has led to their continued collaboration on *Dragonheart* with Dennis Quaid and *Daylight* with Sylvester Stallone for which she served as executive producer. Among her other executive producer credits are Ron Howard's *Backdraft* and several movies for television, including the action-packed *Vanishing Son* series.

In 1997, De Laurentiis produced *Kull the Conqueror*, which marked the feature film debut of director John Nicolella and star Kevin Sorbo. Filmed in Slovakia and Croatia, this marked De Laurentiis' second production in Eastern Europe. She then remained in the United States for her next two projects, first *The Guardian*, a television pilot directed by Rob Cohen for Universal/NBC, on which she was executive producer, followed by the action film, *Black Dog*, directed by Kevin Hooks and starring Patrick Swayze.

De Laurentiis returned to Slovakia in 1999, producing *Dragonheart: A New Beginning*, a direct-to-video sequel to *Dragonheart*, directed by Doug Lefler, and again in 2001 to executive

produce the NBC miniseries, *Uprising*, with Jon Avnet. *Uprising* stars LeeLee Sobieski, Hank Azaria, David Schwimmer, Jon Voight and Donald Sutherland.

Also in 2001, she returned to her love of family fare and executive produced *Prancer Returns*, a direct-to-video sequel to her holiday film, *Prancer*, directed by Joshua Butler and starring John Corbett, Stacy Edwards and Jack Palance.

In 2004, De Laurentiis continued her association with Jon Avnet on the visual effects laden feature film, *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, as Executive Producer. Helmed by first-time director, Kerry Conran, the retro sci-fi adventure stars Gwyneth Paltrow, Jude Law and Angelina Jolie.

Most recently, De Laurentiis reunited with director Doug Lefler to produce the Roman epic, *The Last Legion*. The film was shot in Tunisia and Slovakia and stars Colin Firth, Sir Ben Kingsley, and the queen of Bollywood, Aishwarya Rai.

### **Wang Zhongjun (Executive Producer)**

Wang Zhongjun is the president of Huayi Brothers Media & Co. Ltd.

Very early on, Wang developed a strong passion for the arts and served as a press photographer from 1982 to 1985. From 1986 to 1989, he was appointed manager of the Yongle Cultural Development Advertisement Department before heading to the U.S. to study for his PhD in Media at the New York State University. In 1994, he returned to China with money he had earned working as a part-time cartoon artist and photographer and started Huayi Brothers Advertising with younger brother Wang Zhonglei. The privately owned company was based in Beijing.

After six years, in 2000, they created Huayi Brother Pictures, which successfully invested in acclaimed Chinese TV series such as *It Must be You*, *South Shaolin*. They also brought talented Chinese directors on board and made a succession of hit full-length features such as Chen Kaige's acclaimed *The Emperor and the Assassin*, *Big Shot's Funeral* and *Battle of Wits*.

Huayi Brothers is the first film company to receive a big injection of funds from insurance and banking institutions without any collateral. The loans are to help sell distribution rights overseas.

Today, Huayi Brothers Media & Co. Ltd has become the largest media chain in China with its own advertising, design, music, talent management, film production, distribution, marketing and promotion companies. It has also been propelled to the position of the most successful private film production company in China.

### **Wang Zhonglei (Associate Executive Producer)**

Born in 1970, Wang Zhonglei is the president of Huayi Brothers Pictures. Since being established in 2000, Huayi Brother Pictures has been making TV series and films by the dozen every year.

In 2004, four films by Huayi Brothers, *A World Without Thieves*, *Stephen Chow's Kung Fu Hustle*, *Kekexili Mountain Patrol* and *Breaking News*, took in over 350 million yuan (43.75 million U.S. dollars) at the box office, amounting to a staggering 35 percent of total sales in the Chinese film industry for that year, a record for a single film company in China.

In 2005, Huayi Brothers invested more than 100 million yuan (12.5 million U.S. dollars) in two major productions, *The Banquet* and *Battle of Wits*, both of which were box office hits both in China and overseas. *A World Without Thieves* and *The Banquet* are both directed by the company's star director Feng Xiaogang who has made six critically acclaimed box office successes in Asia since joining Huayi. His blockbuster film for 2007 is *Assembly*.

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### **Yuen Wo Ping (Action Choreographer/Executive Producer)**

Coming from an industry hailing nearly as many action directors as celebrities, Yuen Wo Ping has distinguished himself as one of the best and certainly most renowned Hong Kong action director in the world.

Born in Guangzhou, Yuen was the eldest of 12 children belonging to famed actor Simon Yuen Siu Tin. Having trained Yuen in Peking Opera, his father introduced the young man to film producers who gave work during the '60s. As kung fu films gained popularity in the early '70s, Yuen migrated to Shaw Brothers who used him in small parts and as a stuntman in films like *The Chinese Boxer* and *Duel of Fists*.

*Mad Killer* became Wo Ping's first official film as action director, a position that was highly regarded in an industry dominated by action-oriented films. The film was directed by Ng See Yuen who went on to found Seasonal Films, an independent production house where Wo Ping would eventually direct his first feature starring a then relatively unknown actor named Jackie Chan in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. Yet, it was the following film entitled *Drunken Master*, also starring Jackie, which truly propelled both men into mainstream success. In 1979, Wo Ping formed the Wo Ping Films Company whose first project was *The Buddhist Fist* which

co-starred Siu Tin who appeared in many of his son's films.

The next milestone in Wo Ping's career came in 1984 when he wisely cast a talented young martial artist in *Drunken Tai Chi*. Donnie Yen Ji-Dan had become his protégé after being discovered two years earlier. Then a revival of classic martial arts film led by director Tsui Hark in the early '90s brought the all three together in *Once Upon a Time in China II*. For the next five years, Wo Ping redefined Hong Kong action by creating increasingly elaborate fights employing wires and imaginative choreography that more closely resembled his former Peking Opera roots than much of the Chinese boxing that Bruce Lee once made popular. *Iron Monkey* stands as perhaps his best film from this era and certainly an excellent example of his kinetically fluid style of action.

Having already gained cult status among genre fans and new wave filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino, it came as little surprise that the Wachowski brothers, themselves fans of Hong Kong cinema would tap Wo Ping's skill in creating their vision of an action comic book come to life in *The Matrix*. The film's tremendous success, coupled with a growing interest in Hong Kong film after Jackie Chan's successful Hollywood entry led to the creation of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, directed by Ang Lee. By matching the epic fantasy elements of Lee's favorite Chinese swordplay films from his youth with a Western aesthetic, Wo Ping was able to create a uniquely dramatic and breathtaking series of action sequences that general audiences worldwide could identify with.

After sequels to *The Matrix*, his international stature grew with the global success of his work on Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill 1 & 2*. Yuen's recent projects include Hong Kong superstar director Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle*, Jet Li's *Unleashed* and *Fearless*, *House of Fury* by director Stephen Fung, and the Chinese grandeur epic starring Zhang Ziyi, *The Banquet*.

Wo Ping continues to push the boundaries of action cinema and prove that martial arts cinema is truly an art form worthy of its Chinese roots.

### **Peter Pau (Director of Photography)**

Peter Pau is the Oscar-winning Director of Photography who together with director Ang Lee re-invented the classic Chinese martial arts tale with the multiple Academy Award winning, international blockbuster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Pau avoided the cliché of shooting action from very low or high angles because he wanted the action to be more intimate at eye level or just a little lower. "That way", he says, "instead of observing the action, the audience becomes part of it." An interview with Ang Lee by David E Williams (*American Cinematographer*, Jan. 2001)

described Pau as “probably the biggest and most Hollywood-like cinematographer in all of Hong Kong, in fact he is probably more Hollywood in style than Fred Elmes (ASC), who shot my last two films. He has directed films, and he even served as our assistant director — he’s probably one of the few cinematographers in the world who can do all of that”.

Pau has been one of the top cinematographers in Hong Kong. After his graduation of Filmmaking at San Francisco Art Institute in 1983, he directed his first feature *The Temptation of Dance* and *Misty* in the 90s.

Pau has been working with the top directors such as John Woo (*The Killer*), Tsui Hark (*Double Team*, *Love in the Time of Twilight*, *The Chinese Feast*), Ronny Yu (*Bride With White Hair*, *Bride of Chucky*, *The Phantom Lover*, *Warriors of Virtue*), Patrick Lussier’s *Dracula 2000* and Michael Davis’ *Shoot ‘Em Up* as well as Peter Chan’s *Perhaps Love*.

Awarded five times for best cinematography at the Hong Kong Film Awards, Pau has also received 12 nominations amongst more than 30 features in his 22 years of filmmaking.

In 2002, Pau directed his third feature, *The Touch*, starring Michelle Yeoh and Ben Chaplin.

In 2005, Pau worked with the Chinese famous director Chen Kaige for *The Promise* — one of the most ambitious films in Chinese cinema as well as *Perhaps Love*, a musical film by director Peter Chan.

### **Bill Brzeski (Production Designer)**

Bill Brzeski started designing productions in feature films, television, interior design and theatre over 20 years ago. After receiving his undergraduate degree from Miami University and his Master of Fine Arts in Design from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, Brzeski’s original interest was to design sets for the ballet and the opera, and so he started off by designing in theatre in New York City before moving to Los Angeles eventually. He then began his career in Hollywood, working in television. To date, he has designed over 800 episodes worth of TV production.

As Production Designer in feature films, he first lent his design talents to the James L. Brooks Oscar-winning *As Good As It Gets*, as well as Martin Lawrence’s *Blue Streak* and Danny DeVito’s *Matilda*. He also worked on the groundbreaking CGI movie *Stuart Little* and its sequel *Stuart Little 2* for Sony Pictures, and that was where he met director Rob Minkoff.

Two of his recent endeavors have been *Catwoman* released in 2004 and *The Bucket List* Starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, directed by Rob Reiner and released over Christmas 2007.

Brzeski has also designed commercial spaces, most notably the award winning “*Susina Bakery*” in Los Angeles.

Lately, Brzeski has embarked on a teaching career doing Production Design Workshops at graduate and undergrad levels. New York University School of The Arts, Miami University, Clemson University, and Loyola University Film School have hosted his design seminars.

### **Shirley Chan (Costume Designer)**

Shirley Chan graduated from the l’Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne in Fashion Design in 1977 and practiced as a fashion designer in Hong Kong for 3 years before venturing into costuming designing for her first film. In 1986, she was nominated for the Best Costume Design award at the Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan for two films one of which was *Legend of Wisely*. She eventually took home the award for her work in director Tsui Hark’s *A Chinese Ghost Story*. Other nominations to her name include the Hong Kong Film Awards in 1993, 2005 and 2006.

Over the years, Chan has been actively sought after to create the costumes and image for the characters in film and TV commercial projects across Hong Kong, China and Taiwan. Having since accumulated almost a hundred films to her name, Chan was once again, in 2005, nominated for her work in both Tsui Hark’s *Seven Swords* and Stephen Chow’s *Kung Fu Hustle* at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan. Repeating her win in 1986, Chan was awarded the Best Costume & Make Up Design for *Kung Fu Hustle*. Prior to this winning feat, Chan had collaborated with Stephen Chow on a number of his films including *Royal Tramp*, *Flirting Scholar* and *From Beijing With Love*.

Before *The Forbidden Kingdom*, Chan has already been a long time collaborator with both Jackie Chan and Jet Li, having worked on many of their films including *Police Story II*, *City Hunter*, *Gorgeous*, *The Accidental Spy*, and with the latter in *The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk II*, *My Father is a Hero*, *The Bodyguard from Beijing*, *Fist of Legend* and *Hitman*.

Her other works include *Chinese Box* starring Gong Li, *Jasmine Women* starring Ziyi Zhang and *The Touch* with Michelle Yeoh and directed by Peter Pau.

Costumes in *The Killer* and *Once Upon A Thief*, both by director John Woo are also credited to Chan.

### **Eric Strand (Editor)**

Eric Strand grew up watching 16mm films in his living room. His mother Chick Strand was a critically acclaimed experimental and documentary filmmaker in the 60’s and 70’s, and

until retiring, ran the film department at Occidental College. So ever since he could remember, there was always an editing room at home.

Starting out as a sound assistant on Saturday morning cartoons such as “Fangface” and “Plasticman” in 1979, Strand soon secured a job in film shipping at Paramount Pictures before eventually moving up to be film apprentice on *Airplane 2*. Moving from an apprentice to a 1st Assistant Editor, Strand has worked on films such as *Gremlins*, *Staying Alive*, *Firestarter*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, *Eddie Murphy*, *RAW*, *Hand That Rocks The Cradle*, *I’ll Do Anything*, and *Cutthroat Island*.

Over a spread of twenty years, Strand worked with editor Geoffrey Rowland, A.C.E on TV series “Hill Street Blues” which won an Eddy Award, followed by “Stagecoach” starring Willie Nelson, Kris Kristopherson, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings, and then on the controversial mini-series “Path to 9/11” for ABC, which won numerous awards including an Emmy and an American Cinema Editors award for editing.

As Additional Film Editor, Strand worked on the John Hughes film *She’s Having A Baby*, and then on *The Experts*. He also scoured WWII archive footage editing the documentaries for the huge mini-series “War & Remembrance” and edited the 60-minute TV series “Over My Dead Body” for CBS.

1992 was the pivotal year when Strand co-edited with Academy Award® winning editor Ralph Winters, A.C.E. on *Troubleshooters*, noted for its editing in a review by Variety. Since then, he has gone on to be co-editor on the Universal feature *The Hunted* starring Christopher Lambert, John Lone and Joan Chen, the multiple award-winning *Lethal Weapon 4* and *Deep Blue Sea* (both working with award-winning editor Frank Urioste) and with Stuart Baird on *Mission Impossible 2* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, also both nominated and winner of numerous awards.

In 2000, Strand co-edited the critically acclaimed and highly decorated nominee and award-winning cult classic *Donnie Darko* starring Jake Gyllenhaal. This has led to a slate of interesting independent films such as the festival-winning *Briar Patch* (aka *Plain Dirty*), *Deepwater* and *Shooting Gallery*. He has also donated his time to edit a short *Glory Girl* directed by Martha Cotton for the Director’s Workshop for Women at AFI.

His other recent credits include the skateboard comedy *Grind*, teen witch horror movie *Tamara*, cable movie *Ambers Story*, crime thriller *Borderland* and the poker *Deal*, starring Burt Reynolds.

Much like the Jason character in *The Forbidden Kingdom*, Strand was a big fan of Bruce Lee movies and had his room plastered with Bruce Lee posters when he was young. Having

studied martial arts for a total of 7 years, Eric has always wanted to work on a martial arts film, so he is extremely proud to be the Editor on *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

### **Ron Simonson (Senior Visual Effects Supervisor)**

Ron Simonson's experience as a Visual Effects Supervisor has its roots in Cinematography. His career began in feature films as a Cameraman and Director of Photography shooting miniatures, explosions and various other elements related to special and visual effects. After some years at the acclaimed Richard Edlund's Boss Film Studios working on films like *Air Force One*, *Starship Troopers*, *Multiplicity*, Simonson moved to Metrolight Studios as Post Production Supervisor. There he worked on several ride films for Universal theme parks as well as Disney World and Epcot. Simonson later became Visual Effects Supervisor on Universal's *Dragonheart II - A New Beginning*.

Following Metrolight, Simonson reunited with Richard Edlund to Co-Supervise Harold Ramis' *Bedazzled* for Fox Studios, and later join forces on HBO's "Angels in America" for which they were nominated for an Emmy in 2004 for Best Visual Effects in a mini-series or movie.

Simonson went on to supervise the award-winning mini-series "Uprising" for NBC and "Something the Lord Made" for HBO, winner of the 2004 Emmy for Best Movie. For *The Forbidden Kingdom*, Simonson underwent a globetrotting experience, as he had to oversee effects work in Hong Kong, Los Angeles as well as Seoul, Korea where the bulk of the work was being done. He is currently finishing up post production on *The Brothers Bloom*.

### **David Buckley (Music Composer)**

David Buckley is a British-born film and television composer working in Los Angeles, where he moved his main studio in 2006. He has written music for a number of Harry Gregson-Williams's scores, including *Shrek the Third* (Dreamworks SKG), *Shrek the Halls* (Dreamworks SKG), *Gone Baby Gone* (Miramax), *Flushed Away* (Dreamworks SKG/Aardman), *The Number 23* (New Line Cinema), *The Revenge* (Scott Free), and *Jolene*. He has also contributed music to the Playstation game, *Metal Gear Solid 4*. Recently, Buckley completed the score for *Town Creek* (Lionsgate, directed by Joel Schumacher).

Educated at Cambridge University, Buckley's first involvement with film music was as a cathedral chorister, performing on Peter Gabriel's score for Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. His commercial work began with composing for the Tussauds Studios, writing tracks, which featured in the leading theme parks across the UK and Europe. In 2002 he

teamed up with television composer Keith Bayley, and between them they have written scores for dozens of television shows and advertising campaigns.

Buckley still has works performed in UK concert venues and on radio stations, and is frequently used as an arranger for pop and crossover artists.

A wide range of musical styles has influenced Buckley's output. This ranges from classical, historic, ambient, electronic, choral to ethnic. He is equally at home with a large-scale symphony orchestra as he is scoring from his Los Angeles studio.