

Action Film Making Master Class -- Anecdotes

"NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER"

1. Casting For Kurt And JCVD

When we were casting the lead roles for "NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER", we held an open casting call on the lot of Raleigh Studios. We expected to see about 30 or 40 people, and were totally unprepared for the hundreds of people that showed up. They were all lined up outside the building, standing in the hot sun.

We had put in an ad for several very specific types of people, mostly young, but the line outside was all different kinds: old, fat, balding, etc. Very few of the people waiting outside were right for the parts we were casting, and we definitely didn't have time to see everyone that was waiting, so I was nominated as the person who would weed out the undesirables, and choose the people to come into the office.

What a job, and what a responsibility! I walked up and down that line, looking at the people and trying to keep in mind that I couldn't feel sorry for them--I had to just choose people based on how they looked--something that I had been taught not to do most of my life!

It was probably one of the toughest jobs I've ever had to do in the movie business--I felt sleazy as I picked the people we wanted to see, and the looks of disappointment on the faces of the ones I didn't pick really got to me.

This is the one side of the business I don't like--having to choose one person over another. In a perfect world, everyone should get the parts they want...it just doesn't work out that way.

2. JCVD Losing His Control (With Tim, With Pete)

The first fight scene we had with Jean Claude Van Damme was the scene in the dojo at the beginning of the film, where Jason's father is teaching in the dojo, and the bad guys walk through at the end of class. JC is one of the bad guys, and he goes after the father, played by Tim Baker.

During this fight, Jean Claude jumps off the shoulder of one of the other bad guys and flying side kicks Baker in the face. The kick is a spectacular one, but unfortunately JC hit Baker in the face the first time he did it, cutting his lip and drawing blood. This hindered our filming for the rest of the night, because now Baker didn't trust JC, and didn't want to stay in there when JC was throwing kicks to his face.

It must have been tough on JC, as this was his first film, and he was excited and wanted to do a good job. Certainly, Baker would be jumping to work with him now!

3. What Kind Of A Guy JCVD Was

I remember Jean Claude being a super guy. He was always friendly, and always had a smile on his face. He was hungry back then, and needed the work and the opportunity to be in a feature film, so he was very appreciative of the part that we gave him. And, he's been able to turn it into a hugely successful career. We knew that Jean Claude had something, which is why we signed him to a two picture contract. It's a shame for my career that he broke that contract, or I'd probably still be working with him.

I've heard horror stories about the way Jean Claude is on the set these days, but when I knew him I thought he was the perfect gentleman. He was always on time, always ready to give 100%. He was a joy to work with, and I hope he continues to be that way.

4. Rewriting At Night:

As I mentioned earlier in the book, my first draft of the screenplay for "NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER" was much too long, and that meant rewriting and cutting while we worked. One of the most precious commodities on a film set is time, and there was no time to rewrite on the set, while people were waiting to film.

So, every night after working on the movie, I would retire to my bedroom in the apartment in Sherman Oaks and work on the scenes for the next day. I would discuss what was supposed to happen with the director, he would make comments, and I would immediately integrate them into the script.

It was tough, long work, and many nights I toiled into the wee hours only to be awakened after an hour or two of sleep to start filming. I learned, however, what does and does not work in films--it was an incredible learning experience.

5. Changes On The Set

Everyone's a writer! We were filming the party scene in "NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER", and one of the actors was having trouble saying his line: "Now you know who's the best!", while he was holding Kurt down, his knee in his back.

The actor kept saying "Who the best is" instead of "Who's the best". I kept shaking my head and indicating to the director that we had to go again. Finally, after about 5 takes, the make

up woman looked at me and said, "What's the difference? It means the same thing!"

Well, it's a small point, and it probably didn't make or break "NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER", but I am very careful with the way things are said. "Who the best is" is not as powerful as "Who's the best!" You can't snap the first out, but you can the second. It just sounds and works better, and I feel strongly that the dialogue that is said anywhere, in any film, should really be concentrated on--it can't be normal unless there's a reason for it to be normal.

On the flip side, dialogue shouldn't be catchy and witty if it's not in the character to be that way. But, dialogue should reflect the characters in the movie, so not everyone talks the same way. Listen to the people around you, you can tell a lot about them by the words they choose, and the sound of their voice.

Dialogue is a powerful tool in a movie--and you have to be careful in its use.

The danger is compromising your principals in the heat of battle. I could have backed down and allowed that actor to say it any way he wanted, but I didn't. And I've stuck to that ever since.

6. Working with Korean "Bruce Lee"

The actor we hired to play Bruce Lee's ghost was an interesting guy. He had mannerisms just like Bruce's, so when he was in character, it was really eerie to watch him. He also had the biggest knuckle callus I've ever seen. He got it from hitting stones, and he was always walking around the set hitting things to keep the callus up. It was fascinating, but extremely ugly. In the movie, Bruce Lee's ghost has a good bit of dialogue, so when I first met the actor I was very anxious to go over the dialogue, to make sure there wouldn't be any problems.

The first problem was: the actor didn't speak a word of English! How, then, was he to do his dialogue? I asked.

The idea we came up with was to hire a Korean dialogue coach, and construct sentences in Korean that matched the English dialogue in timing and delivery, and then dub in the English later.

You should have seen Kurt's face, when he was going through a dialogue scene with "Bruce Lee" and all that's coming out of his mouth is Korean! You have to give Kurt credit, though, he came out with a great performance given the circumstances!

The idea, when it finally got down to dubbing the picture, really didn't work. You can tell the scenes where Bruce Lee has dialogue have been dubbed, and they are less effective because

of that. Also, many of the sections are shorter than necessary to fit in the entire English dialogue, so a good many of the passages had to be cut drastically--and that's where the message was being imparted.

I was disappointed with that portion of the film, but on the whole the movie did incredible business. It is still one of my best known films.

7. Kurt Not Wanting To Do The Stunt With The Rope

During one scene, Kurt was training with "Bruce Lee", and he was to put his foot in a loop of a rope hanging from the ceiling, then jump up and try to kick a bag that was also suspended from the ceiling. Kurt was supposed to miss the bag several times, falling down to the floor each time.

Well, Kurt put his foot in the loop, and then balked at doing the kick, saying "It's going to hurt".

Now, the Hong Kong stunt directors and fight choreographers don't have a lot of patience for American actors who refuse to do what they consider "safe" stunts. Yuen Kuai, the director, came up to Kurt and just said, through me (he didn't speak much English), "Do it!"

Kurt went back to the rope, looking at it, then shook his head. Yuen Kuai, you have to understand, came up through the same Chinese opera school that Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung came out of, and he was used to doing all sorts of things for the camera, and this was a baby stunt to him. He couldn't believe that Kurt wouldn't do it.

It got tense in the room, and everyone was waiting to see what would happen. This shot was necessary for the scene, and neither one of them was going to budge. So, Yuen Kuai threw down his cup and put his own foot up in the loop, then jumped up and kicked the bag, then fell down heavily on the floor.

He popped up immediately, looking at Kurt and saying, "See, it's not hard. Now do it!"

Kurt sheepishly got right into position, and did the shot. It wasn't as hard as it looked, and he did it correctly, first time, without getting injured in any way.

8. Fingertip One Arm Pushups

In the film's training scenes, you see Kurt McKinney, who plays Jason Stillwell, doing one arm fingertip pushups. Quite a feat, huh? Well, not exactly...

First off, Kurt didn't know how to do one arm pushups, so I had to show him the correct form. Then, he tried to do it for the camera, and it just didn't have the impact. So, Yuen Kuai, the

director, decided that it would be much more effective for the pushups to be faster, and to be off two fingers. I pulled him off to the side and said, "He can't even do one arm push ups fast enough, how's he going to do this?" Yuen Kuai just smiled and held up a piece of wire cable.

They affixed a wire to Kurt's back with a special harness, and every time he goes up and down, there are really three Chinese stunt men off screen pulling on a wire that takes him up with ease, and keeps the pressure off his fingers! He looks great doing it, doesn't he?

Why doesn't the wire show? Because they hid it by having the trees in the background, and what wire did show they spray painted white so it would blend in with the sky.

Pretty ingenious, huh?

"NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER II:RAGING THUNDER"

1. Script Revisions And Walking Out:

During the development of the script, I was working with Roy Horan, a salesman for Seasonal Film. He got it into his head that he wanted to be a producer, so he pitched Mr. Ng an idea and sold him on it. I wasn't thrilled with the idea, but I didn't hate it, either.

So, I met with Roy to discuss the storyline, and then went back home to write the script. I called the project "Holiday in Cambodia", after a song that was popular (at least with me) at the time. I turned the script in to Seasonal, then met with Roy again.

Roy didn't like my take on the script, and when we met had rewritten my script! This had never happened to me before, and it threw me for a loop. Here was a salesman trying to be a writer, with no credits, no credentials, who just thought he could go ahead and rewrite my work.

I read through the script, and I didn't like any of it--except for the stuff that was still mine. I suppose I was not reading with the most objective eyes, but I still thought the stuff that Roy did was horrible. It was chock full of jargon and clichés, and took what I thought was a good story and turned it into a "macho" trek through the wilderness.

The central point of my attempts at the script was that Scott Wylde, the character Loren ended up playing, was an innocent, thrown to the wolves in Thailand. To show him as a "fish out of water" was important to the development of his character: but Roy changed all that. In his versions of the script, Scott is no an innocent, he is a man of the world--he is already a hero (much like Stallone's character in "Cobra"), and therefore has

nowhere to go, no way to grow. A worldly-wise character can't suddenly become naive, but a naive character can become more skilled in the ways of the world.

So, each time Roy would rewrite the script, and then I would change it back. We went round and round like this for a little while, then Roy finally persuaded Mr. Ng that his take on the story was correct, and that's when I pulled out.

The movie went on to be fairly successful, but when I saw it I wanted to disown it. I don't like the movie, I don't like the story, and I especially don't like having my name associated with it. I get second or third billing anyway, with Roy taking the primary writing credit. That's OK, because the stuff he changed really didn't work.

I'm fond of saying that the stuff that was good was mine, and everything else was his.

Roy didn't work with Seasonal on another film after that one. The worldwide sales were good, but I told Mr. Ng that if Roy was involved, I wouldn't be.

2. Problems On The Set

The set of this movie was out of control. Roy Horan, who had been the salesman for Seasonal Film in the past, had no experience producing, and, as we know, problems arise constantly on the set of a film. It seems that Roy was completely unprepared for dealing with all these headaches. One of the stories I've heard from several sources concerns a day when it was raining hard in Thailand. Roy insisted that all the actors stay on set (which was out in the boonies, far from the hotel) in case the rain stopped--a reasonable request. Well, one of the actors just didn't want to wait, and started to leave. Instead of talking to this actor, or letting him leave and talking to him when he calmed down, Roy grabbed one of the live guns and threatened this actor with it, forcing him back onto the set! Honest! This is the story I heard.

And, when I heard it, I was extremely glad I hadn't gone on location.

3. Kurt And JCVD Backing Out Of Their Contracts

NRNS 2 was to be the follow up to the first movie, using both Kurt McKinney and Jean Claude Van Damme, who had helped to make the first movie so successful. The only problem was: neither of them showed up for work.

NRNS 2 was the movie with which I wasn't intimately involved. I wrote the script, but I didn't go on location. Roy Horan was the producer of the film, and he eventually ended up taking script

credit as well--and that's what I took exception to. So, all I know is that I got a frantic call from the President of Seasonal Film to tell me that neither Kurt nor Jean Claude showed up in Thailand for the first day of shooting.

As it turned out, Jean Claude got the part for "Bloodsport" so he broke our contract to make that picture, and Kurt decided that he didn't want to work for Roy, so he stayed away. It really hurt the company at the time, because we had a complete crew in Thailand waiting for the lead actors, but they scrambled and were able to find replacements: Loren Avedon for Kurt's role, and Matthias Hughes for JC's. Both of these actors have gone on to make a number of very good movies, but neither has achieved the level of stardom that Van Damme has.

"NO RETREAT NO SURRENDER III: BLOOD BROTHERS"

1. Keith And Loren's Fight By The Pool

During the filming of the scene in the movie when Loren finds his father dead, and then Keith walks in, emotions between the two stars came to a head. They never really got along (I think Loren was threatened by Keith's championship experience), but it all came out during this scene.

Loren was bent on crying and being very emotional during this scene, even though the script didn't really call for it. I didn't want him to break down, but he was certain he knew how to play it. Rather than cause a big problem, and delay filming, I let him go, thinking that I could temper his acting while it was happening. The scene started, and progressed well, until Keith made his entrance, and together they had to deal with the father's body.

Keith rightly felt that it was important that he show his love for his father, but Loren was holding Joe Campenella in such a way so that Keith couldn't get to him. We tried to film it in several different ways, but each time it was apparent that Keith didn't have anything to do--he couldn't get to his Dad, and he wasn't supposed to console Loren.

Finally, Keith mentioned to Loren that he has to have something to do, and everyone got into the act. The DP came into the conversation, Lucas Lowe the director started talking, and I was putting my two cents in, while the dialogue coach was also there.

To be fair to Loren, it was a little bit overwhelming, but instead of dealing with hit intelligently and calmly, he just blew up.

He screamed in this indoor pool, his voice echoing off the walls: "Everybody just get the fuck away from me!"

The entire place got deathly quiet, and all eyes were on Loren...and Keith.

Keith was standing close to Loren, his fists balled and his body shaking with anger.

He said in a very low voice, full of implied violence, "Tell me you're not talking to me."

Keith was ready to tear into him, and he could do it in a heartbeat. Keith is one of the best fighters I've ever seen, and he is always on top of his game. Even though he's long retired from competition, he can still mix it up with the best of them. I was almost looking forward to seeing the conflict between Loren and Keith.

But, it didn't happen.

Loren immediately apologized and told Keith that he would never talk that way to HIM, he was just talking about everyone else. He smoothed things over with Keith, but Loren certainly didn't make a lot of friends on the cast or crew that night.

2. Stunts Vs. Fights

"No Retreat No Surrender III" was the first Screen Actors Guild (SAG) movie we did (all the others were non-union), and it was quite an experience. One of the more interesting aspects of working with the union was the subtle difference between stunts and fights.

According to arcane SAG regulations, actors can fight, but they cannot do stunts without getting a stunt adjustment (usually double the standard rate) and without a certified SAG stunt coordinator on set.

Well, we didn't have a certified SAG stunt coordinator on set, and we really didn't have any STUNTS, we had FIGHTS. There was a tight line, but to all production people concerned, we were doing a fight movie, not a stunt movie.

There were some tense moments on the set, however, when a fight scene developed into something that could be considered a stunt. I remember one scene in particular, when we were filming in an abandoned warehouse.

The guys from Hong Kong were setting up the scene, and they called for a fight double to take a fall from a railing above the floor. Immediately, people started murmuring "stunt". I communicated this to the fight coordinator, and he shook his head and said, "Part of the fight."

OK, I thought, that sounds reasonable.

Now, every Hong Kong fight director I've ever worked with has depended on cardboard boxes when any kind of fall is required. Instead of using a crash pad, the guys from Hong Kong set up boxes--they aren't flat, they are put together, empty boxes, and

it works surprisingly well. I've taken a couple of falls on top of the boxes (they usually put mattresses on top of the boxes), and it's actually very comfortable.

The fight director was setting up the fall, and many of the production people and the cast were very concerned--the railing was about 20 feet up, and they were worried about the fight double who would take the fall--and they were worried about their exposure should anyone get hurt.

One crew member, in fact, quit over the fall, thinking that it was a stunt and that he would be implicated if something went wrong.

Seeing all this commotion, I became concerned myself over the safety of the fight double, but when I went over to the fight director to tell him, he just shrugged and smiled. "No danger," he told me, and signaled for the shot to be done.

It went ahead, and the fight double leaped off the railing, falling to his "death" 20 feet below. It was no problem, and they got the shot the first time around.

It was a to do over nothing, and underscored the very macho attitude of the fight doubles and fight coordinators from Hong Kong. Anything we think is dangerous, they scoff at--but they go out of their way to make sure that they have prepared in every way so that nothing happens. They aren't fool hardy--they just understand what they are doing much better than anyone else.

3. Changes To Script At Last Minute

One of the most maddening parts of filming "Blood Brothers" was the director's lack of preparation, and his penchant for wanting to change scenes at the last minute. Lucas Lo (spelled "Lowe" for "The King of the Kickboxers" and "American Shaolin") was hired at the last minute to direct "Blood Brothers", and he came onto the set without the benefit of having time to storyboard everything (as is his custom), and it seemed throughout the production that he was flying by the seat of his pants most of the time.

And, that meant playing it fast and loose with the dialogue, which really irked me. I always spend an inordinate amount of time on each scene, carefully crafted them to make sure that the correct words are chosen, and that each character's dialogue suits his or her personality. But, Lucas would come in for the day, and I'd find out that he wanted 3 pages of dialogue cut to 3 lines for the next shot.

It was maddening, and it wasn't a way to go about shooting a movie.

I remember one particular scene in a cemetery. The Donahue boys were burying their father, and were to have a huge confrontation

scene as Will left prematurely. It was about 2 pages of dialogue, but it was important, character-developing stuff: and Lucas wanted it cut. At the last minute. He wanted only a couple of lines while Will got into his car.

And, the most maddening part was that the only reason he wanted it changed was that we were running out of time. Lucas had burned most of the day shooting "extras", and we were forced to fit the scenes with the lead actors into a couple of hours. This is a standard fault of Lucas, and I've seen it in every movie we've worked together--he plays around with the location, the extras, etc. and leaves the real work for last--the scenes with the lead actors, where the story gets told.

I was pissed! And, I almost walked off the set and told him to take a flying leap, but I knew I'd just be hurting the movie. It was my responsibility as co-producer and writer to ensure the quality of every foot of film, and I couldn't trust Lucas to get it right without me--even if he wanted it changed.

So, I took the actors off to the side, explained the situation and how angry I was, and then together we devised a way to change things around so that it all still worked, and the characters come off OK.

The scene that ended up in the movie works OK, but I still think the original scene was stronger. From that point on, I warned Lucas that he couldn't do that again--if he wanted changes made, we'd talk about them, and I'd have time to do them correctly. I'm not a big fan of improvisation--too many small nuances and plot points are imparted in every scene, and everything has to match, to change things around at the last minute. Besides, I don't think that last minute inspirations are necessarily better than finely crafted ideas--ideas that have been worked on for months.

Too many times, compromises have to be made on a film set. But, the worst thing to do is to compromise to make it easier--film making is supposed to be hard work!

4. My Children On The Set:

This was the biggest confrontation I ever had with Lucas. I had brought my children down to Florida to be on the set. I had even constructed a shot where they could be used as extras. At the time, in 1989, my oldest son Kalen was 6, and my youngest, Evan, was 4. Lucas set up the shot so that the camera would pan by them while they were "asleep", and he expected them to remain still while the camera passed.

That sentence alone shows you how little Lucas knows about people, and especially about children. We tried the shot a

number of times, but each time one or the other (and even a couple of times, both!) moved, thus making the shot unusable. Lucas was getting frustrated, and he was beginning to lose his temper. Several times, he snapped at my children. No thought was given to the fact that the shot was too long and too dependent on perfect performances from the children. Finally, he wanted to pull Evan, who was moving a little more than Kalen, out of the shot. I lost my temper then, pulling them both out, and telling Lucas that if he ever even so much as talked to my children I would kill him.

I was on the verge of physically attacking Lucas for his remarks to and about my children, and Ng See Yuen, the President of the company, had to calm me down.

5. Being Hassled By The Unions

Unions are a fact of life when you are working in the movies. First of all, there is SAG--the Screen Actor's Guild. Then the crew people have a union (IATSE), and you also have to deal with the Teamsters, that's right, the union that has such a reputation for criminal activity is actively involved in the film industry.

When we were down in Florida, arranging to film "NRNS 3", we had a run in with the Teamsters.

We were a low budget film, and Florida is a "right to work" state (meaning that you don't have to hire the unions), so I didn't expect to have problems with the Teamsters. However, because there wasn't a whole lot of filming going on in Tampa at the time, the Teamsters found out about our production, and showed up at our door, demanding (though politely) that we hire Teamster drivers to drive our trucks.

As an explanation, usually we use production assistants and department heads to drive the vehicles, thus saving the expense of having a dedicated person to drive a truck. Imagine having to hire someone who just drives a truck to the location in the morning, then does nothing until they have to drive the truck back at the end of the day. What a waste, in a situation where no waste can be afforded.

I tried explaining this to the head of the Teamsters, but he wasn't going for it. He said that we could choose to not hire Teamster drivers, but he couldn't be responsible for what would happen. It was a veiled threat, and I was sorely tempted to tell him what to do with his threat, saying that we were a martial arts film, and if he wanted to take his chances going up against us he could, but I couldn't be sure exactly what would happen. So, we started negotiating. We managed to come to a pretty equitable deal: we hired 9 Teamster drivers on the shoot, but

they had to do other jobs than just driving. Luckily, some of the drivers were experienced gaffers or grips, and we kept them working all the time.

And, to be truthful, they all worked pretty hard, and were great guys. They regaled us with stories of how much money they made "working" on the big budget features in Florida, just by driving to and from work. I thought about getting my Teamster card, but decided against it.

Though my experience was a pretty good one, I still didn't care for the way the Teamsters went about getting the work. Threats and intimidation always leave a bad taste in my mouth.

6. Terrorists At The Auditions

One of my favorite stories comes from when we were casting for "NRNS 3" down in Tampa. We had an "open call" for terrorists, and about 50 showed up, dressed to the nines in terrorist garb, sporting sawed off shotguns, machine guns, eye patches, hunting knives, etc. We ran them through their paces, and were having a great time watching them perform in the rear yard of the casting agency.

On the street in front of the casting agency ran a pretty busy road, and it was a hoot to watch the drivers as they drove by do a double take at the action that was going on outside the agency.

At one point in the day, a woman got rear ended by a man on that street. The man got out of his car, in a rage, and started to brow beat the women, yelling at her at the top of his voice, threatening her with lawsuits and with physical violence.

Before you could say "assassination", the entire group of terrorists, weapons in hand, were walking across the street toward the macho man picking on the poor woman.

You should have seen the guy's face when he became aware of the terrorists! It was great! He immediately apologized to the woman, got back in his car and drove off as quickly as he could!

7. Keith breaking his wrist the day before filming started

Typically, before we start a movie, we'll arrange to have the fighters perform for the fight director and stunt men, so that they know what they are working with. Well, in the case of "Blood Brothers", we took Loren and Keith to a small dojo in Tampa one night, two days before we were to begin shooting, and the fight director put them through their paces.

Alternately, Keith and Loren were asked to do various kicks, punches, hand techniques, throws, reactions, falls, etc., with a group of about 10 people, all of them from Hong Kong, watching.

It was a fun night--both Loren and Keith are accomplished martial artists, and they both throw extremely beautiful techniques. The fight director and all the stunt men were very impressed, and they were about to call it a night, anxious to begin filming in two days, knowing that they had a great deal of raw talent with which to work.

Then Loren made a huge mistake: even though they were very satisfied and impressed, he offered to do a double kick into the heavy bag (a flying side kick followed by a flying spinning side kick). The fight director heard this offer and just shook his head, saying that he didn't really need to see it.

He had seen enough.

But, Loren insisted. And then he ran towards the bag, jumped up and did a very good kick, rocking the bag and landing on his feet.

Then, the fight director looked at Keith. "Can you do that too?" he asked.

Keith looked at the bag, at Loren and then at the fight director. "I've never tried it, but I'm sure I could do it." This said, Keith was pretty much committed to trying the kick. He took a run and hit the bag with the first kick, hit the bag with the second kick and then hit the floor.

Hard.

He landed on his wrist, and it immediately SNAPPED.

Broken wrist. Hospital. Forearm cast.

I was stunned, as were the fight guys. In the space of one second, we had gone from a very promising movie with two great fighters as the leads to a movie-threatening injury! I remember standing in the hospital corridor talking with Executive Producer Ng See Yuen about what we were going to do. Could we re-cast the lead at this late date? Remember, we were starting filming in two days!

I went into the doctor's office with Keith to get an opinion of Keith's chances of continuing to work even with a cast, and it looked very grim.

But, being a writer, my mind was working. I came up with an idea that we ended up using, and it worked very well.

Since the movie started with a big fight in a bank, with Keith saving a girl's life, it would make sense for him to get hurt during that fight. So, we designed it so that Keith would get shot in the wrist during that scene, and then he could be in a cast for the rest of the movie. We even added some dialogue into several of the scenes where other characters referred to the cast, making an essential part of the story.

It wasn't an easy sell to the powers that be, but it was far too late to do anything else. We worked through it, and ended up with a very good movie.

8. Working With The Swat Guys (Think I Could Hit Him From Here?)

One of the real pleasures of making "NRNS III" was working with the law enforcement people from Tampa. They were very professional, and willing to help us in any way that they could. We ended up filming in the Tampa Police Department, and we used countless cop cars and real police officers in many scenes. In one particular scene, at the beginning of the movie, Keith Vitali is saving everyone inside the bank, while outside the bank is surrounded by what looks like the entire Tampa police department. We used off duty police officers as extras for that scene, but we needed even more people, so I dressed up as a policeman, and got ready to surround the bank.

I climbed into the back of a squad car and closed the door, waiting for the exact point when the car stopped to open the door and jump out, crouching down to point my fake gun at the bank.

I was ready. Except for one thing.

The door in the back of the police car didn't have any way to open it from the inside. I had forgotten that this was where they put the prisoners, and they don't have any handles on the inside of the car!

The car slammed to a stop, and the two police officers in the front jumped out, but I was forced to stay in the car.

And feel really stupid.

Luckily, it was just a rehearsal, so it wasn't that bad (though I did catch a lot of grief from the crew). So, the next time, I made sure that I kept the back door cocked open a little bit, so I could get out.

Except, the next time the car stopped, it stopped even harder, and the force of the stop pulled the door back closed.

I was locked in again!

Once more, fortunately, the take was a bad one, and we had to do it again.

This time I made sure that the door didn't close, and I got out and got into my correct position, gun pointed at the bank. I don't think it made much difference in the final shot, but at least I was there!

9. The Stripper On The Set

The president of Seasonal Film Corp., Ng See Yuen, happened to have a birthday during the filming of "Blood Brothers", and I wanted to do something special for him. I hired a stripper to dress up like a cop, and serve Ng a "ticket", then sit back and watch the fireworks.

That day, we were eating lunch on the set when a policewoman walked onto the set, a warrant in her hand. She called out loudly for a Mr. Ng. Ng innocently raised his hand, and all of the Hong Kong people eyed her suspiciously, and then motioned for me to stand up and get into the action. Head off the law. I sat where I was.

She walked up to where Ng was sitting and issued him a citation in front of the entire cast and crew. Ng didn't quite know what to make of it, but he was doing whatever he could to comply with whatever she wanted him to do.

Director Lucas Lowe, on the other hand, was irate. He started yelling at me to go help Ng, and as I sat there, my arms folded, doing nothing, he got more and more angry, screaming at me to do something.

I shook my head and told him there was nothing I could do...it was the long arm of the law. Lucas said some choice words and sputtered with rage.

Meanwhile, the "policewoman" is reading Ng his rights, charging him with unlawful and abnormal sexual conduct, and by this time, Ng has figured out what is going on, and he's having a great time.

Finally, the "policewoman" started to shed her outfit, and even Lucas was able to tell that it was a gag, and immediately Lucas donned his dark sunglasses and pulled back, his tirade forgotten.

The stripper went on with her act, getting down to just a g-string and tassels, and Ng had the time of his life. It was a great gag, and Ng appreciated the planning that went into it, and thanked me for arranging it.

Lucas, on the other hand, to this day asserts that he knew she was a stripper from the moment he saw her.

Yeah, right.

"THE KING OF THE KICKBOXERS"

1. Billy And Mike DePasquale, Jr. In Strip Bar

Thailand is famous for its strip bars, and maybe even more famous for trying to rip off unsuspecting tourists. Billy Blanks and Mike DePasquale, Jr., on the night they ventured into the Bangkok's den of iniquity, were unsuspecting tourists.

They decided to go to Pat Poon, where the highest concentration of strip bars are. They entered a place that advertised no cover, and sat down to enjoy the ambience. After having one drink, they decided to leave, as they had work to do the next day.

Only the people inside the bar wouldn't let them leave. They wanted Billy and Mike to pay some outlandish amount for the drinks they had (something like several hundred dollars). At first, Billy and Mike, being the incredible fighters that they are, refused to pay.

That's when the 6 big tough fighters appeared.

And, rather than cause a scene and maybe lose, jeopardizing their careers and perhaps their lives, they decided that discretion really is the better part of valor (at least in Pat Poon), and they paid their bill and left.

They made the right decision. Many a tourist has complained about prices or unfairness, only to see Thailand from the inside of a hospital room.

2. Training with Billy Blanks

While we were filming "King" in Thailand, I had the opportunity to work out with Billy Blanks. I had been running and staying in shape, but I hadn't fought for a long time. Still, when we decided to throw some kicks together, I knew I had to take advantage of sparring with one of the greatest fighters of all time.

So, one afternoon on a rare day off in Kao Yai, Thailand, Billy and I went into one of the meeting rooms and started stretching, then throwing some kicks.

Now, I'm not a great fighter by any stretch of the imagination, but I can usually hold my own. I won some tournaments when I was a kid, and I was picked to represent the state of Ohio in fighting and kata when I was 17. So, how much better than I could Billy be?

Light years.

There might not even be a number high enough to describe the gap between his skills and mine. I felt like a white belt facing off with Billy. He was very kind, and didn't completely destroy me, but he was and still is an incredible fighter.

We fought for about 10 minutes, and the entire time I don't think I was ever in any danger of scoring a point. Billy could do anything at will, and it was a great humbling experience for me. He could have taken me out at any time during our sparring session, and I came to know what it feels to be completely outclassed.

3. Days Off In Kao Yai

One of the great things about movie work is being able to travel to distant places and see things that people don't normally see. In the course of the filming of "The King of the Kickboxers", I

got a chance to live and work in Thailand. Bangkok is not the greatest city on earth, but it certainly is exciting and action packed. One of the most crowded places I've ever been (I even had trouble running in the city, due to the incredible traffic at all hours of the day), Bangkok was a nice city to eat out in (great restaurants) and sightsee (some great temples). I enjoyed Thailand more when we were able to get out into the countryside. We filmed in the ancient temple ruins outside of Bangkok, and that was incredible. Centuries old, these ruins have not been renovated or commercialized, they are just left as testaments to days gone by. We spent several days filming in and around the ruins, and it was very exciting to walk through the remnants of the ancient Thai culture.

We also filmed some scenes in an area called Kao Yai, which is a nature preserve in the middle of the country. Way out in the boonies, it was definitely worth the trip.

Kao Yai was the setting for the climactic final scene of "King", where Loren Avedon's character "Jake" fights in the snuff film inside the bamboo cage. As scripted, the bamboo cage blows up at the end.

Obviously, we couldn't blow up the bamboo cage in the middle of Bangkok, so the entire crew moved up to Kao Yai for about 10 days of fun in the sun.

And, it was definitely sunny. Hot, to be exact.

The Kao Yai Resort, the only hotel anywhere near our set, was a first class hotel (the only one I've ever stayed in while on location), and it was fantastic. The food was great, the accommodations were incredible, and they even had a beautiful pool. Unfortunately, in the 10 days we were there, I only had one day off to enjoy it, but I remember that day very well. The filming went pretty much on schedule, and we blew up the entire "snuff film" set with a combination of gasoline and TNT on the final day. We filmed that shot, since it couldn't be redone, with three cameras, all from different angles, just to make sure we didn't miss a thing.

4. The Topless Scene (And Additional Projects From Sherrie)

I had written a topless scene for the character of Molly in "The King of the Kickboxers", and during casting we were very up front with all the women we auditioned. There was going to be some nudity, and they needed to know that going in.

In fact, we told everyone that there was (limited) nudity, and advised the casting directors not to send women that wouldn't consider baring their breasts. The last thing we wanted was to choose someone, and have them decline because of the nudity. If they knew about the nudity from the start, we would only see

women who were OK with it. I want to be very clear about something, however: we did not ask the women to shed their clothes during the casting. That would have been unethical. We saw a host of actresses, and finally made the choice for one woman in particular, and signed her for the part of Molly. About a week before she was due to arrive in Thailand, I got a call from our casting agent in Hollywood--the actress wasn't coming. She, at the last minute, had second thoughts about the nudity involved, and pulled out. Exactly the situation we were trying to avoid!

There we were, in Thailand already, about a week into filming, without a lead actress. Scrambling, I remembered an actress that we had worked with in Tampa on "No Retreat No Surrender III: Blood Brothers", Sherrie Rose. Sherrie is a very good actress, and was a former Playboy Playmate, so she fit perfectly: good talent and a willingness to take off her top.

I called her and made the deal, and she got on a plane and flew to Thailand. She had spent a couple of months in Thailand filming another movie a year before, so she was familiar with the place, and had some friends there. Everything seemed to be working out perfectly: she fit in well with the cast and crew, she did a good job in her scenes, and everyone was pleased with the choice.

That is, until the time came for her to take her clothes off for the camera. The scene itself was pretty innocuous: Molly shows up while Jake is in the bath tub, and proceeds to slip her clothes off and join him in the water.

It wasn't really gratuitous nudity, as it was integral to the scene and the relationship between Jake and Molly, and it went by very quickly. The night we were to shoot this scene came, we cleared the set of any unnecessary crew people, and prepared to roll the cameras.

And, Sherry started to protest.

She didn't want to do the nudity.

I explained to her that she had agreed to do it, and it was a condition of her employment.

She still refused to do it.

I reminded her of her promise to do it, and her background (Playboy and all that), but it had no effect. She was in a good bargaining position: we'd already shot a couple weeks of footage, so replacing her would have been very hard, and very costly.

Finally, after about 45 minutes of pleading, arguing and fighting, the director had to promise that he would be very careful about what appears on camera, and she finally agreed to do what she had agreed to do a long time ago.

The scene went off without a hitch, and it goes by in "King" very quickly--it's actually a nice break from the violent action.

One night back in the USA, long after that confrontation with Sherrie, I was watching HBO's "Tales From the Crypt" and on comes an episode, with Sherrie Rose in a starring role. Interested, I watched the whole thing, surprised to see the most graphic breast nudity I think I've ever seen--and all of Sherrie's breasts! We're talking close-up nipple shots, full chest nudity in most of the scenes...I was stunned! Here was the woman who complained about a shot that lasted at most 5 seconds baring her breasts for several minutes at a time! That's Hollywood! Maybe the prestige of "Tales" induced her to take her clothes off.

5. The Extra With The South Philly Accent (Dregs Of The Earth)

During the filming of "The King of the Kickboxers", I had to travel to Germany for 5 days on other business, so I had to be off the set for that period of time. We were doing mainly action scenes, having built my departure into the schedule. Even so, we had some problems.

The first was one of the guys we hired locally, who was an American. We hired him for the part of the "director" of the snuff films, and he seemed OK during the auditions. When he got to the set, however, what he did wasn't OK. I wasn't there, so when he decided to use what he called a "south Philly" accent, no one was there to tell him not to. Director Lucas Lowe, even though he speaks very good English, doesn't know the difference between a southern accent and a New England accent. So this bozo decides to do an accent, and it ends up on film! When I got back, we had another scene scheduled with the same "actor" (and I use the term loosely here), and when we were rehearsing lines before we shot, I heard the accent. I immediately stopped him, saying, "Hold on! Where did that accent come from?" He told me it was south Philly, and I informed him that I come from Pennsylvania, and I know what south Philly accents sound like, and that was no south Philly accent. Unfortunately, he had already used this bogus accent in one scene, and it wouldn't work to have him change it now, so I had to live with it. Every time I see the scenes where this guy talks, I cringe inside, wanting to cover my ears!

6. Not Being On The Set:

I was not on the set for the filming of the first snuff film scene from "King", so I didn't catch the following gaffe: This scene was set up to show a young fighter coming on to the set of what he thinks is a real movie. The director coaches him about trying to make it look real, and then the scene starts. As I had scripted it, the actor gets banged around a little bit, then stops the scene and tells the director that he's been hit. His line of dialogue is, "Hey, he hit me!" Well, the fight coordinator decided to change the scene around a little, allowing the attackers to use weapons, and instead of getting hit, the actor gets cut on his hand. And says "Hey, he hit me!" Not exactly what you would say if you got cut on the hand, right? You might say "Hey, he cut me!" or "Hey, I'm bleeding!" or something along these lines, but not "Hey, he hit me!" Still, this is what the actor said, and since I wasn't there, no one corrected him, and that's how it is on film.

7. Homosexuals On The Set

Thailand is known for its free spirit, and that translates to a great deal of sexual freedom. I'm as "live and let live" as the next guy, but when someone tries to force their sexuality on me, I can't put up with it.

We had a problem on the set of "The King of the Kickboxers"--when we were filming up in the North of Thailand, in the jungles in Kao Yai, we had to hire a bunch of extras from the surrounding area. Well, it turns out that most of these extras were homosexuals, and they were very overt in their sexuality, going as far as to approach members of our crew and proposition them. One of the actors was being pursued so strongly that the production company had to step in and tell them to knock it off, or they'd be off the set.

We hired a videographer to do a "making of" video, which by the way never got made, for a number of different reasons, and he was a target of several of these "amorous" extras. On several separate occasions, these extras would just walk right up to John and grab hold of his crotch--sort of their way of saying "hello"!

8. Don Stroud and Dialogue:

Don Stroud, who had the part of "Anderson" in "King", is a great guy and a great actor. He's been in so many movies, and done such great work, that he was a pleasure to work with. Once we got some ground rules established.

We had gone through some informal rehearsals before he started working, but our time was limited because he cost a lot of money, and we wanted to get him in and out of Thailand quickly. The first night Don was scheduled to work, he showed up right on time at the riverside restaurant in the heart of Bangkok. We started running the lines while the camera was being set up, and Don turned to me and said, "I know my lines, but I just want to play with some different ways of saying it."

Now, when any actor wants to change dialogue, my defenses go up. I spent too much time analyzing the dialogue to let anyone cavalierly change it. Of course, if an idea is good and works with the character, I have been known to go along with it. In this case, however, it was clear that Don didn't know his lines that well, but he understood the scene, and he was trying to ad lib his way through it.

After a few minutes of running the lines, and getting something different every time, I took Don aside and we talked. I love what you're doing with the dialogue, I told him, but the other actors are waiting to hear your dialogue cues in order to say their dialogue, and if you say something different every time, they're not going to know when to come in.

He nodded, understanding this. So, I continued, let's just do the scene the way it was written, and everyone will know what to do and when to do it.

Needless to say, we shot the scene as scripted.

"AMERICAN SHAOLIN"

1. Negotiations with big names (not wanting to shave the head)

When we were casting "American Shaolin", we desperately wanted to make it an "A" level movie, which meant going after a "Star". We knew that contracting with a star meant a number of things;

- more money
- less fighting ability
- greater acting ability (hopefully)
- more hassles
- greater box office potential
- greater visibility for the movie

I convinced Seasonal president, Ng See Yuen, that it was the logical next step. We were at the top of the "B" action movies, and the only way to go was up. He gave me the green light to start approaching some "name" actors.

Now, I was the first to admit that I didn't have any experience dealing with "stars"--I had negotiated with Joseph Campanella, Don Jaecal and others, but no stars. Still, I figured...how tough could it be?

I was about to find out.

First off, any mention of shaving the head (a must for the part of Drew Carson, who becomes a Shaolin monk) was instant dismissal from most agents. What ever happened to artistic integrity and sacrifice? No one wanted to shave their heads--I spent about a month negotiating with Jason Bateman's agent, only to find out that Jason "would never consider shaving his head for the part", even though we were talking about major money! So, I went for the next tier--the "up and comer", the actors who weren't stars yet, but had the potential. I figured we might be talking about \$50,000 for the project for this kind of an actor (the most we had ever paid). Foremost in our minds was the negatives to getting a up and comer--the biggest of which was the lack of fighting ability. We would have to stunt double the actor most of the movie, which gets very time consuming and very expensive.

So, imagine my surprise when the up and comer's agent (we had decided on one particular actor--a very nice guy and full of talent) told me that the starting price would be \$250,000. Then and there we knew that it wasn't going to happen. We settled for a very good actor with a black belt in karate. We still had a great deal of trouble with the acting, the action and the making of the movie in general, but it would have been a great deal worse without the martial arts background. It might have been easier to sell the picture with a name actor in the lead role, but who knows? As it was, we ended up compromising the picture, but we were still successful in making what I consider to be our best picture.

2. Support Of The Martial Arts Community

One of the most pleasurable parts of filming "American Shaolin" was the support we found in the martial arts community. Helped by Michael DePasquale, Jr., a very close friend of mine, we were able to arrange for extras and for featured extras to perform in the scenes we had to film. I was able to get lots of martial arts involved in the production of the film, and at the same time these martial artists were fantastic to work with.

As I've said many times in the past, I prefer to work with martial artists. Martial artists understand sacrifice and dedication. Unlike actors, who are not normally "troopers", martial artists will put up with anything (waiting, uncomfortable conditions, etc.), as long as they know they are helping. And the martial arts community was really behind our efforts to make "American Shaolin" the best film it could be.

3a. Asbury Park, NJ

As a location for the opening of "American Shaolin", Lucas Lowe and I decided that we would like the melancholy look of a shut

down amusement park. We went to Hershey Park, in Hershey, PA, first, but the park was too well maintained to get the right sort of atmosphere for which we were looking. So, we got in my car and drove to New Jersey to hit the shore points, where there are a number of boardwalk amusement areas.

We found exactly what we were looking for in Asbury Park, NJ and Seaside Heights, NJ. In Asbury Park, we found the rundown, deserted look of the town and the boardwalk with its convention center, and in Seaside Heights, we found a great amusement park (complete with ferris wheel) for background shots.

Next, and up to me, was securing these locations for our use while filming. Neither location turned out to be a great deal of trouble, though my first experience in Asbury Park was definitely not auspicious.

I was to meet our production manager, R.D. Strickland, and several other crew members in Asbury Park one morning, and I drove there from my home in Pennsylvania. I arrived a little early, and parked close to the convention center to read a newspaper and drink my hot chocolate (it was a cold morning). As the mist from the ocean cleared, I realized that I was parked about 20 yards from a crime scene. Stretching out around the boardwalk area was the yellow "Police Line--Do Not Cross" tape, and leather jacketed police officers were standing all around! I got out of my car and walked over to them and asked them what was going on. They said to me, "Can't you see?" I looked around but didn't see anything out of the ordinary, until the officer pointed under the steps to the boardwalk.

There, lying on the ground with her skirt up over her head, was the victim of a rape/murder--a 60 - 70 year old bag lady!

It seems she had been killed during the night, and the police had just recently discovered her.

And, on top of that, she was lying under the steps that I was supposed to take to get into the building where our meeting was scheduled to take place! Needless to say, we found another place to have our meeting.

By the time the rest of the people I was to meet arrived, the woman had been put into a body bag and carted off. It left a sick feeling in my stomach for the rest of the day, and I never quite forgot my "introduction" to Asbury Park.

3b. Shooting in Asbury Park

When we decided to shoot for several days in Asbury Park, all I heard was to be careful, and about how dangerous it was.

Personally, I thought Asbury Park was a great place--not a great place for a vacationing family, maybe, but I still enjoyed it. I went running on the boardwalk every morning, and no one bothered me in the least.

In fact, we had less people around us while we were filming than anywhere else, probably because there are so few people left in Asbury Park.

One interesting aspect of Asbury Park is that there are many former tourist hotels that have been turned into halfway houses for mental patients, so it's kind of like "zombie town" in some ways, because you get a lot of people just walking the streets mumbling to themselves, without anywhere to go.

The architecture of the old buildings and the convention center and boardwalk complex in particular is amazing, and you can really get a feeling for what the city must have been at its peak.

4. Lucas' Brush With Death

Lucas has never been the most sensitive person on earth--in fact, he is one of the most selfish and egocentric people I have ever met. He does not know how to handle people--he is very good with an image, and with setting up backgrounds, but when it comes to handling people, he is inept.

The strange part is that one of the director's prime responsibilities is to handle the talent.

One day, we were filming outside the Tian Tai temple, doing the scene in the movie where all the disciples of the Shaolin Temple were working on the latrines. It was a hot day, and the work was long and hard. Soon, the extras started to get tired. And, when people get tired, they start to complain. It seemed to them that Lucas was spending too much time, and was much too particular about what he was doing--and he was cool and comfortable in his director's chair, with his lady friend at his side.

So, the extras started to take shelter inside the buildings around the set, trying to get out of the hot sun. Who could blame them? Well, Lucas could, and he did. In loud, obscene Chinese, Lucas called them every name in the book.

And then some.

So, ultimately, the extras didn't come back to work. We were forced to finish a crowd scene without a crowd. It wasn't much fun, but it had to get done. Everyone on the set disagreed with the way Lucas handled the situation, and I try to make amends for him (something I did way too much of while I was in China), but it didn't do any good. They didn't come back...to work.

But they did come back. That night.

And they came back for Lucas.

We went out to dinner that night, because the food was so abysmal at the "hotel", we went into "town" to a "restaurant" (all these terms are in quotes because they are very loose uses of the terms).

On the way back from the restaurant, as we were driving up the small, dirt and gravel road to the temple, the bus stopped. Suddenly, the bus was surrounded by an angry, Chinese mob. It was the extras from earlier in the day, demanding satisfaction. And, these extras weren't just ordinary Chinese. They were martial arts experts, come all the way from Hangzhou to film. They were pissed, and they were out for blood. They tried to board the bus, but the crew stood between Lucas and the angry mob.

Cliff Lenderman, Reese Madigan, Daniel Dae Kim, Billy Chang and I stood them off, wondering the entire time why we were bothering. In the midst of the excitement, I looked back at Lucas, who was doing his best to remain cool. He had put his sunglasses on, and his arm around his Chinese girlfriend, and he was trying to ignore the enraged frenzy.

Cliff was ready to fight--I kept telling him, "Don't hit them!", over and over, and I could tell that Cliff wanted nothing better than to tear into the mob and deal out some justice.

In the middle of the melee, Reese looked at me and said, "What are we doing?" None of us really wanted to protect Lucas, but we were all part of the same team, so we did it.

After about 15 very tense minutes, where the bus was rocked back and forth, and we were pushed this way and that, we cleared the bus and drove to the hotel.

The extras were angry, but all they were really demanding was an apology. An admittance by Lucas that he had been wrong in yelling at them.

This, he refused to do.

When we got back to the hotel, we knew it was only a matter of time before they came to the hotel, so we went looking for Lucas to get him to apologize.

But, he wasn't to be found.

He was hiding.

The martial arts experts from Hangzhou showed up, demanding to see Lucas, demanding an apology. After about 20 minutes, I found Lucas hiding in another room, his girlfriend on his arm, and I told him to go in and apologize. At first he refused, but after some "persuasion" (where someone mentioned that the mob would somehow find out where he was), he agreed.

He went into the room and said to the group, "If you misunderstood my remarks and took them the wrong way, I am sorry."

It wasn't an apology, it was a cop out. Lucas had used obscenities I'd never even heard before, and others I would be ashamed to print, so there was no way anyone could "misunderstand" or "take the wrong way", and Lucas was still not admitting any wrong, and still not apologizing.

They accepted it, after a while, and left quietly. Still, we knew that there could be trouble the next day, when we had to film another scene. We decided that Lucas should leave for Shanghai a day early, and the stunt coordinator and I would finish out the shoot at the Tian Tai location. He did as he was told, and did not feel any remorse for his actions. It's my opinion, and this is shared by many members of the cast and crew, that if we hadn't defended Lucas that night, and kept the mob away from him, that Lucas could easily have died that night.

5. Working With The Communists

One of the most frustrating things about making "American Shaolin", on location in mainland China, was dealing with the Communist Chinese. I'm used to scheduling a certain amount of work, and finishing what we scheduled every day. During the filming, I can count on one hand how many days we actually finished what we started. It was maddening to have a scene scheduled for one day stretch into two or three or four! One particular instance occurred when we were using a Mainland Chinese cameraman. We shot the first week of footage, and then watched the "dailies" to see how everything looked. I watched the first couple of scenes, where Reese Madigan tries to get to the Shaolin temple, with my mouth agape, stunned. Half of the time, Reese wasn't even on camera when he was saying his lines! The cameraman wasn't doing the simplest of tasks--keeping the leading man in frame all the time. When we approached the cameraman, he shrugged and said, "I didn't realize you wanted him in frame." Both the director and I wanted to strangle the guy, but instead we immediately sent for another cameraman from Hong Kong. As it turned out, because of the Chinese regulations, we couldn't even fire the guy. He ended up following us around the entire 3 month shoot, sitting in the production van the entire time!

6. Lucas and Reese: Never Got Along

Actors are notorious for their egos, and directors are right up there as well. And, in Lucas Lowe, we had a director that had an ego to match the size of the Great Wall of China. So, when Reese and Lucas started working together, sparks were bound to fly. It's not necessarily anyone's fault, it just happened. Reese arrived with a chip on his shoulder, having been told by his agent that he was the second coming of Tom Cruise. When you're told great things you start believing your own press, and once you do that, look out.

Reese had never done a movie before being awarded the lead role in "American Shaolin". We sort of expected a genial young man who was willing to learn all he could about the process of making a movie--what we got instead was a cocky kid who tried to pretend that he knew everything there was to know. And, whenever someone tried to tell him something, he didn't want to listen. Factor Lucas and his grating personality into this equation, and you have a prescription for disaster. And, I was always caught in the middle. I knew that both were being childish, but for the good of the picture, I couldn't let the relationship deteriorate into open antagonism.

It was tough, but we struggled through.

Neither Lucas nor Reese are friends of mine at this point, and that doesn't bother me. I'm sure it doesn't bother them either.

7. Food and Watermelon

Chinese food, along with Italian, is my favorite kind of food, so before I left for the filming in China, I was excited about the great meals I would have.

I needn't have bothered.

On the rare occasions we could go out to eat (about once a month), the food in the restaurants and hotels we went to was unbelievably good. But, the food on the set and at the hotel in which we were actually staying, was horrible.

To give you an idea of how horrible, when I left for China, I weighed 180 lbs, when I got back to Shanghai after three months in the interior of China, I weighed 162!

18 pounds lost--I didn't feel bad, but I was certainly hungry for some good food.

My standard meal after 14 - 18 hours of filming was as follows:

- White Rice with Vinegar
- Crackers
- Peanut Butter

That's it. No wonder I lost weight. I am not the most adventurous eater in the world, but most nights there wasn't enough good food to fill me up. We were regularly served frog (a big farm staple in the area in which we were staying), eel and fish (I don't eat much fish), so I was doomed from the start. Luckily, I had prepared and brought 4 jars of peanut butter with me. Also, the people from Seasonal in Hong Kong sent in Care packages about every week (M&Ms, Peanut Butter, etc.).

8. In The Little Town, Wanting To Quit:

"American Shaolin" was by far the hardest film making experience I've ever had. There were many times when I wanted to quit, and the only thing that kept me going was my commitment to making a high quality film.

The director of the picture, Lucas Lowe, was out of control, and no one on the Chinese crew paid attention to the schedule. If we went over and didn't finish a scene we were supposed to, nobody cared. They actually liked it, because they were living in better quarters and eating better food than they would at home, so they weren't in a hurry to get things done.

It was a bad situation, and everyone was in a horrible mood. by July of the summer of 1991, I had been away from my family for 3 months, with no end in sight. Everything was taking twice as long as it should have, as it would have in the U.S., and I wanted out.

It all came to a head when we were in Feng Hwa, a little town that was the birthplace of Chiang Kai Shek. We were in the middle of nowhere, the food was horrible, the weather was hot and humid and oppressive, the lead actor was sick and hard to work with, and the hours were incredibly long (16 - 18 hours every day, sometimes 9 or 10 days in a row) and hard. I was missing my kids, my wife and just my life--but the movie wasn't done.

I was able to get through that period by concentrating on the task at hand, and taking it one day at a time, and I'm glad I stuck it out. We got a GREAT movie out of it, so my effort was not in vain. It was harder than anything I've ever done, and I don't know that I'd choose to do it again.