

NOT JUST A STUNT

A daring stunt-double duo takes on dual roles as directors.

Chad Stahelski and David Leitch speak in shorthand when it comes to shooting stunts. Also mixed martial arts throw-downs, crazy car crashes and escaping explosions.

After 20 years performing, choreographing, coordinating and directing movie stunts together — not to mention setting up their own stunt company — Stahelski and Leitch have become experts at big-screen action.

Starting as stunt doubles for Keanu Reeves and Brad Pitt, they've grown to oversee stunt action on blockbuster fare such as *The Wolverine*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Hunger Games* franchise. For the last few years, they've been ready to take the next step: finding a film of their own to direct.

Reeves helped make that happen when he introduced them to *John Wick*, an action-saturated thrill ride.

"When I got the script ... I immediately thought of Chad and Dave for the action design, but I was secretly hoping they'd want to direct it," Reeves says. "I knew that they would love the genre and I knew that they would love *John Wick*. And I thought the worlds that get created — the real world and then this underworld — would be attractive to them, and it was."

Reeves stars as the titular character, a retired killer-for-hire who's drawn back into the underworld, seeking revenge after thugs steal his car and kill the dog given to him by his dead wife. Willem Dafoe also stars.

After reading the script, Stahelski and Leitch, both martial arts experts and Bruce Lee fans, told Reeves they wanted to tell the story of *John Wick* with a graphic-novel twist, creating a stylized, heightened reality where the suit-clad killer could systematically shoot 84 people in a nightclub without batting an eye or wrinkling his clothes.

They also wanted to craft a character whose outsized motivations would make sense to audiences. And they wanted to prove to themselves that, after 20 years in the movie business, they could tell a story from top to bottom as filmmakers.

"It was the challenge — and the ego



Chad Stahelski (left) and David Leitch (second from right), co-directors of *John Wick*, demonstrate holding techniques at 87Eleven Action Design in Inglewood, California. Stahelski and Leitch have become experts at big-screen thrills, after two decades performing, choreographing, coordinating and directing movie stunts.

of ourselves — to prove that we could do something different," says Stahelski, a tall, lean man in his mid-40s with an authoritative demeanor that belies his easy smile. He's been friends with Reeves since working as his stunt double in *The Matrix* movies.

Reeves supported the pair's pitch to producers, and the veteran stuntmen had their first directing gig.

Stahelski and Leitch, who was Pitt's stunt double in *Fight Club* and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, formed their stunt company, 87Eleven Action Design, in 2004. Their facility, tucked inside an industrial complex near Los Angeles International Airport, is a hub of muscle, flexibility and creativity, with a

team of 16 choreographers on staff.

One section of the warehouse space holds weight machines and gymnastics mats; another has a springboard floor where lithe athlete-actors practice artful falls into stacks of empty cardboard boxes. Various swords, battle axes and medieval weapons stand in the corner beside a wood-and-metal rig that can be adjusted for parkour or high falls. Posters of the movies the company has worked on line the walls.

Reeves spent three months working with half a dozen 87Eleven athletes to prepare to become *John Wick*, learning judo, jiu-jitsu and other fighting styles, plus mastering firing and

reloading an assortment of high-powered weapons.

Stahelski and Leitch typically take on several big projects a year as stunt coordinators and second-unit directors, creating and shooting action sequences for other directors' big-budget projects. But they stepped away from those opportunities to spend 18 months making *John Wick*.

"Stunt coordinating is a good training ground for directing, because you have exposure to all the departments in film," Leitch says. "There's a lot of directing within the stunt coordinator's job."

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The final movie of *The Hobbit* trilogy, directed by Peter Jackson, is scheduled to be released in December.

Epic price tag attached to *Hobbit* trilogy

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in Wellington

The movie trilogy *The Hobbit* has so far cost nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars to make as the epic continues to set new benchmarks for studio spending.

Financial documents filed this month in New Zealand, where the three movies have been made, show production costs through March had reached \$745 million.

The figures include filming and digital effects completed over several years but not the final eight months of production costs leading up to the scheduled December release of the final movie. It's not clear from the documents whether worldwide marketing and distribution costs are included.

Warner Bros, which is making the movies, on Tuesday declined to answer questions about the costs. "We don't comment on production budgets," writes Candice McDonough, a senior vice president at New Line Cinema and Warner Bros Entertainment, in an e-mail.

The cost eclipses previous records for film productions. On a per-film basis, however, the movies are not the most expensive ever made. At least not yet.

Box Office Mojo and Guinness World Records estimate that record goes to *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, which cost about \$300 million to make.

Box Office Mojo estimates the first two *Hobbit* movies took in a combined \$1.98 billion at the box office.

Typically, studios provide only vague estimates and have been accused of both underestimating and overestimating costs as it suits them for publicity purposes. But in New Zealand, Warner Bros set up a wholly owned company to handle the trilogy, which has filed regular financial reports that are publicly available.

The latest documents show the production received \$122 million from New Zealand taxpayers through an incentive scheme designed to attract big budget movies to the country. Such schemes are common in US states and countries that compete for movies.

Trilogy director Peter Jackson has been promoting the anticipated release of *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* on social media, putting up movie posters on his Facebook page.

"We're getting closer now," he wrote in a post last month.

chengdureport

More overseas banks as Chengdu becomes financial hub

By FU CHAO

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With two overseas banks setting up new branches in Chengdu in May, the capital of Sichuan province has made another step towards its goal to be the financial hub of western China.

By the end of July, the city had 16 overseas banks including Standard Chartered, Citibank and JP Morgan Chase. The city's local corporate financial institutions are also growing rapidly with a variety of products hitting the market.

According to data from the municipal government, the city generated 484.3 billion yuan (\$79.1 billion) in GDP in the first half of 2014, with the financial sector generating 10.3 percent of the total. Gross profits in the financial sector reached 49.8 billion yuan, up 13.8 percent.

The Chengdu city government released a plan in May to develop a service-centered city with the objective of becoming "the most robust and innovative financial hub". By 2015, profits in the financial sector will account for 20 percent of the service sector, said the plan.

More overseas banks

In May, ANZ Bank and Hang Seng Bank opened branches in the city.

Michael Smith, CEO of ANZ Bank, told Xinhuanews that Chengdu plays a significant role in the economic growth of western China, a region ANZ has targeted as a key market.

Xu Bin, director of Hang Seng Bank's Chengdu branch, told People's Daily in July that the bank has set up operations in many Chinese cities, but Chengdu impressed him the most with so many big real

estate companies from Hong Kong.

"Almost all of real estate big names are here, and also many Hong Kong companies. We feel we have to come here too," said Xu.

Chengdu has formulated a range of policy measures that add appeal for overseas financial institutions including cross-border renminbi settlement and mobile e-commerce services.

The city government also has policy support for overseas financial institutions that are developing innovative new services like e-commerce.

The city now has the most overseas financial institutions of any central or western city, said experts.

Its 16 overseas banks have total assets of about 34 billion yuan, a small number compared with the city's total bank assets of some 5 trillion yuan. Yet an official from the city's

financial administration office said the overseas institutions have a substantial impact on Chengdu's economy.

The official said the banks are from different regions and countries and specialize in various businesses that can support local businesses in a more comprehensive way.

With deep experience and good traditions, the overseas financial institutions also trigger reforms at local banks in the city, said the official.

Local institutions

The city government also stresses nurturing local corporate financial institutions to provide services in economic and social development.

The government has helped set up a range of new local corporate financial institutions in the recent years. The Bank of Chengdu and Chengdu Agricultural & Commerce Bank are also growing rapidly.

Sichuan Jincheng Consumer Finance is one of four consumer finance companies approved by the China Banking Regulatory Committee and the only in the central and western regions.

The company's general manager Huang Qili said that the major businesses of the company include installment payments and loans for consumer goods like mobile phones and home renovation, and for services like weddings, travel and education.

Chengdu Tianfutong Financial Services Co is working on a third-party electronic payment system. The company's latest product, the Tianfutong card, allows users in the city to pay for public transport and water, gas and electricity with just a swipe.

Zhou Jun, a staff member



WEI XIAOCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chengdu International Financial Square is a symbol of the city's growing financial might.

in the company's marketing department, said that more than 10 million Tianfutong cards have been issued and every day the cards average 3.8

million transactions. People can also use the card for movies, shopping at supermarkets, dining and even travel at the city's major tourism spots.

The card now covers suburban areas around the city. The company has been working on expanding its service area to cover cities near Chengdu.



The Chinese characters for Chengdu composed of the logos of the Fortune 500 companies that have operations in the city.