



MovieMaker: HANDS-ON-PAGES

MovieMaker Magazine

Buried Alive and Other Tales from the Trenches

It's all in a day's work for Stunt University founder Gregg Sargeant

by Jennifer Wood



Think your college midterms were hard? Try graduating with honors from Stunt University! Sure, it's not what generally comes to mind when the words "film education" are uttered, but stunt people are an essential ingredient in what makes the Hollywood formula so successful. Conceived by stuntman Gregg Sargeant, an industry vet who has worked in such films as Total Recall, Hook, Alien: Resurrection and Almost Famous, Stunt University was founded as a way to ensure that individuals embarking on a stunt career could do so prepared for both the physical and business sides of the game. In an interview with MM, Sargeant talks about the misconceptions of his craft, what students can learn in just one week and why "dangerous" and "difficult" are not interchangeable words in the stunt world.

Jennifer Wood (MM): Why do you think Stunt University is the only stunt school in the world?

Gregg Sargeant (GS): Stunts are now a bigger part of movies than everbefore. As Arnold Schwarzenegger said at this year's World Stunt Awards, "without stunts and the people that perform them, there wouldn't be a lot to watch in an action movie." With the advances in computer technology, virtually any type of action imagined for films is now possible-combined with the talents of the action performer. Over my many years in the movie and television stunt industry, I've been continually approached by young people all over the world who painfully try to learn the physical end of the craft, and yet they don't really know anything about the

business side of the stunt industry. I identified a need and Stunt University was born. Our goal is to build educated stuntmen and stuntwomen, not just physically skilled ones.

MM: Who is your typical "student," as far as age, experience level, goals, etc.?

GS: We will not enroll anyone under 18 years of age and we have had students from 18 to 35. The average student is early 20s.

MM: The course takes place over one week. Can you break down the training that your students go through during this time?

GS: The course is an intensive week-physically and mentally-which covers all the basic tools necessary at a beginner level for stunt performers. Details can be seen at our Website, www.StuntUniversity.com. Obviously no one will become an expert in one week, but we definitely put them on the right path to continue their training and a direction to follow or a road map of positive action to continue their pursuit of a stunt career. All the basics are covered.

MM: What do you think is one of the biggest misconceptions people have about stunt professionals in the film industry, as far as what they do on-set?

GS: People think it is a glamorous job. It's not. And they don't realize that an average work day ranges from 12 to 14 hours.

MM: What do you expect of the individuals who are enrolling into your classes, as far as previous experience, attitude, etc.?

GS: Previous experience is not necessary. Everyone must apply to be accepted. Applications are reviewed and accepted students need to be physically capable-meaning generally healthy. We also look for applicants who have a realistic, positive attitude and who genuinely want to learn. We don't accept everyone.

MM: Can you talk a bit about your own career? Who are some of the people you've worked with? What are some of the films you've worked on?

GS: My 22 years as a stuntman and stunt coordinator have been an exciting and interesting journey. Every day is different and I've met the most amazing people along the way-and I don't mean just stars. I mean stunt people, directors, producers, hard-working crew people. I enjoyed working with Arnold Schwarzenegger on Total Recall, George Clooney on Batman & Robin and Matthew Broderick on Godzilla, but there have really been too many to mention.

MM: What do you consider your best experience on a film set?

GS: I consider every film or TV show a great experience. It's a privilege to be working in this industry.

MM: What would you say is the most difficult stunt you've ever had to perform?

GS: That's a question people always like to ask and it's a very difficult one to answer. It's different for everyone. It doesn't have to be a huge stunt to be difficult. I remember that I had to be buried alive once for a TV show. That was difficult!

MM: What are some of the projects your previous students have worked on?

GS: Our students have gone on to work in theme parks around the world as well as movies and TV. We presently have some students who have worked in Japan at Universal Studios and Knott's Berry Farm here [in California]. One of our girls got a part in an action series in Australia and we continually get e-mails from students who are having their own successes. Keep in mind that not everyone decides to go on and pursue a stunt career. Some just enjoy the experience of the stunt course training. We have had large corporate groups who just want an exciting outing for their company employees.

MM: What is the best advice you can offer someone interested in embarking on a stunt career in Hollywood today?

GS: Be honest with yourself. This is not for everyone. Realize that this is a difficult and at times dangerous profession. You will encounter many obstacles to overcome along the way. If you have a true passion, desire and drive for the stunt craft, anything is possible. Yet, like anything in life, there are no guarantees.