

UNLEASHED

A Rogue Pictures Release

Production Notes

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Synopsis

Unleashed, an action drama written and produced by Luc Besson (*La Femme Nikita*, *The Professional*), and directed by Louis Leterrier (*The Transporter*), headlines international martial arts superstar Jet Li (*Hero*), who is joined in the film by Academy Award winner Morgan Freeman (*Million Dollar Baby*), Bob Hoskins (*The Long Good Friday*), and Kerry Condon (*Ned Kelly*).

On and beneath the meanest streets of Glasgow, fiery gangster Bart (Bob Hoskins) is merciless with debtors, would-be rivals, and anyone else to whom he takes even a passing dislike. How does Bart maintain his chokehold? Through his unwitting enforcer Danny (Jet Li), who he has “raised” since boyhood. Danny has been kept as a near-prisoner by his “Uncle” Bart; trained to attack and, if necessary, kill. Danny knows little of life, except the brutal existence that Bart has so crudely and cruelly fashioned for him.

But when Danny has a chance encounter with soft-spoken blind piano tuner Sam (Morgan Freeman), he senses true kindness and compassion for the first time and experiences the transforming power of music. When a sudden gangland coup separates Danny from Bart and his mob, Danny is at last away from the underworld. He takes refuge with Sam and his spunky teenaged stepdaughter Victoria (Kerry Condon). Sam and Victoria open their home and hearts to Danny, who begins to envision a new future for himself. However, the mob will not give up its prize pupil so easily, and Danny must soon fight again, and fight back, to protect his new family and bury his troubled past.

Rogue Pictures presents a EuropaCorp and Danny The Dog Ltd. production in co-production with TF1 Films Production in association with Qian Yang Intl. Inc. & Current Entertainment with the participation of Canal +. Jet Li, Morgan Freeman, Bob Hoskins, Kerry Condon. ***Unleashed***. Costume Designer, Olivier Beriot. Martial Arts Choreographer, Yuen Wo Ping. Wire Technology, Circle Crew Ltd., Philippe Guegan. Production Manager, Thierry Guilmar. Line Producer, Bernard Grenet. Re-Recording Mixers, Cyril Holtz and François Joseph Hors. Sound Supervisor, Vincent Tulli. Artistic Consultant, Robert Mark Kamen. Music by Massive Attack. End Credits Songs by The RZA. Editor, Nicolas Trembasiewicz. Production Designer, Jacques Bufnoir. Cinematographer, Pierre Morel. Co-Producer, Pierre Spengler. Producers, Luc Besson, Jet Li & Steven Chasman. Written by Luc Besson. Directed by Louis Leterrier. A Rogue Pictures Release.

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About the Production

“Combining innovative and raw fight sequences with real emotion, I think ***Unleashed*** is my best work yet. I’m so proud of this movie, and I believe that my fans will love it,” states Jet Li.

“I’ve been in more than 30 films,” he adds. “But I know that audiences want to see something fresh – and I wanted to try to do something new, something challenging to me as an actor. ***Unleashed*** pushed me beyond my limits in a number of ways.”

In reteaming with writer/producer Luc Besson on his new movie, one of the world’s biggest martial arts superstars has some surprises in store for his legion of fans.

Under the direction of Louis Leterrier, ***Unleashed*** pairs Li with not only the requisite opponents to be vanquished in fight sequences, but also with formidable acting colleagues in Morgan Freeman and Bob Hoskins – all while giving him a character who, Li notes, is “the kind of character I’ve never been before. Usually, I play tough guys who solve the problem – save the family, save the city, kill the bad guy. Now, Danny is physically very strong and can knock people down in seconds. But, mentally, he’s only around ten years old.

“I wanted to work with Luc Besson again, and I told him that I wanted to do something challenging – and also something where violence is not the only solution. He said, ‘Like what?’ I said, ‘I don’t know, that’s why I’m asking *you*.’ After a few days, he said, ‘What about a guy who’s like a dog – treated like one – but is saved by music?’ Two months later, we had a script with a wonderful story and character drama, and we got great actors to be in it.”

Morgan Freeman comments, “Jet’s character of Danny is trained to act violently on command, and my character, Sam – who is blind – is trying to salvage Danny’s inner self. Sam senses Danny’s distress, and his humanity. At first, Sam thinks Danny is a child; it’s later that he discovers that Danny is physically an adult. Through this man who can’t see him – who can only feel him – Danny begins to sense that there is something else in him. Thematically, ***Unleashed*** is about trying to stem violence in your being.”

Bob Hoskins adds, “When I read the script, I realized that I’d discovered a real story – one that, while having the rhythm and energy of today’s cinema, has something meaningful to say. This film has many fights and confrontations, but it delivers such

desire for freedom and peace. You want Danny to sort himself out, and you see him discovering himself.”

Li notes, “This film was an occasion for me to go further emotionally, to play something stronger with human significance.” Accordingly, he began preparing for *Unleashed* as he had for no other film. “I’d never taken an acting class before,” he admits. “I learned just by working. This time, though, Luc found a wonderful acting coach from London. For two months before shooting, she helped me study Danny and discover what he was like – what he’s thinking, how he walks, how he reacts. We also went to observe real dogs.

“Danny has been raised by a villain, ‘Uncle’ Bart, like an animal. Danny has a collar around his neck. When the collar comes off, Danny is conditioned to attack people and even kill them. When the collar comes back on, he goes back to being a ‘normal’ dog. He’s a feared fighter, with no conception of good and evil, who only recognizes the voice of his ‘master.’”

The essential physical element of Li’s character and performance called for similar extensive preparation. The production enlisted Li’s close personal friend and longtime professional collaborator Yuen Wo Ping – whose credits include *The Matrix* trilogy, the *Kill Bill* movies, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* – as martial arts choreographer. Li says that Master Yuen helped him “use martial arts to help the character and the story. *Unleashed* is not just an action film, it’s a drama. At the beginning of the film, Danny is not a normal man. We needed to decide on dog-like movements.”

Li remarks, “For me, this was the most difficult part of the film. I have my own style of martial arts, with signature moves. This time, I had to lose my whole body in fighting, like an animal. Usually, when I’m fighting five guys it’s punch this one, kick that one...Not with Danny. Like a dog, he focuses on just one guy; even if there are four behind him beating him up, he doesn’t care. He’s different from other characters I’ve played, in that he doesn’t fight for himself. So I tried to create the right moves for Danny.

“Wo Ping and I worked a lot on the fights, choreographing varied confrontations. It wasn’t enough to make them physically impressive; they had to possess their own dramatic content.”

Even so, Bob Hoskins, whose character of Bart is ringside at many of Danny’s fights, exclaims, “I was amazed by the speed and virulence! Everything was flying everywhere. The stuntmen bounced in every direction, and Jet seemed totally weightless. At the end of the take, I wondered how many bodies we were going to have to pick up off the floor – and then, all of a sudden, they all got up and started over again to do it *better!*”

During the course of the film, Danny undergoes a physical and emotional transformation. Li says, “At the beginning of the film, he is just reactive; he is alone, without anyone to talk to or explain to him what life could be like. Morgan Freeman’s character, Sam, brings Danny towards humanity by giving him family, friendship, and love. Music guides him towards something buried deep within. As Danny gets more human, he has more

control of his body. He realizes what's gone on – and that he doesn't want to hurt people any more.”

To play Danny's extreme initial state – kept as a near-prisoner by Bart – Li was motivated to try additional physical methods to get at the character's core. He comments, “I talked a lot about the character with Louis and Luc. Sometimes, I would stay on the soundstage and not go back to the hotel. I'd keep myself on the set and just eat bread and water. It would get very cold and I could hear a real dog barking somewhere – there was nobody there but myself and the watchman. I tried hard to feel the loneliness that Danny did.

“We put a lot of blood and dirt on my hair, my fingernails, and all over my body. At the end of every day, I needed to shower more than once to get everything off.”

As for his fellow actor who also made sure to get into character, Li marvels, “Morgan, every day, would come out from his trailer already 'blind.' That helped *me* a lot, too.”

Freeman reveals, “Before rehearsals began in France, I called Luc Besson and said, ‘What if I played him blind?’ I'd heard of a renowned school of blind piano tuners, and I thought it would add something. He said, ‘Let me think about that.’ After a while, he said, ‘That's a great idea.’ I used to keep my eyes shut between takes, and often behind my dark glasses – I trusted what I felt.

“When you play a blind person, all of a sudden everybody gets solicitous of your safety and everything. If you really want to know what a blind person goes through, just close your eyes and try to go through life. I had done a stage production of *The Gospel at Colonus*, and five blind men – a gospel group – were in it with me. I spent five years, on and off, with these men. I'd observe them and ask pertinent questions – ‘How do you maneuver? How do you count money? What happens when you get into strange surroundings?’ Preparation, for me, is an ongoing thing for a character; there's things and people to study all the time.”

Freeman clarifies, “There are clichés, such as people who play a blind person with their eyes open... You know, the reason why most blind people wear dark glasses [as Sam does in *Unleashed*] is because their eyes tend to roam around.”

The actor was drawn to *Unleashed* for several other reasons, among them, “the juxtaposition of violence and non-violence in a human being, and of ultimate fighting and music. Luc's *The Professional* is one of my favorite movies. The concept was passionate, and the way the script developed it did not disappoint.

“But the first thing that got my attention was the idea that I was going to act with Jet Li! I know his films and I admire him as an artist. Acting with him was a passionate experience. In a way, we have the same method; we both use our instinct. He's a very gifted actor, incredibly precise with his acting – and more physical than I am; the least of his moves would send me to the hospital for six months,” he laughs.

Freeman adds, “Jet is the perfect person to play Danny because he is so quiet – on a Zen level of existence, it seems. But when he explodes, it’s total. On *Unleashed*, I tried to help Jet find other emotions, to let go of everything he had inside him, everything his roles hadn’t previously let him express.

“Danny is like a piano on which, until now, only the lowest notes have been played. Gradually, we see the whole range that he can play. As in his profession, Sam has recognized an instrument and strives to put it back into tune. At the start of the film, Danny’s a person with no person; he’s been turned into a pit bull. His soul goes undeveloped until he meets Sam and Victoria, Sam’s stepdaughter [played by Kerry Condon].”

Li muses, “The three of us – Morgan, Kerry, and myself – had to act out everyday closeness, a certain intimacy which I’ve never had to play before and forced me to develop other aspects of my acting. The scenes of pure acting required the most work for me – notably, when Danny meets Sam and Victoria. Danny is confronted with things that are banal to everyone else but, because of his hermetic life so far, destabilize him – a spoon, vanilla ice cream...a kiss...”

Director Louis Leterrier clarifies, “Danny is a little bit like the brother Victoria never had – and the boyfriend she maybe doesn’t dare to have. Through music, she manages to bring him so much; when she plays, Danny’s past comes back and his future builds itself.

“Kerry knew very quickly how to place herself in this world of men, and she brought Victoria – and the character’s scenes with Danny – to life.”

The Irish-born Condon earns praise from Freeman as “one of those naturally gifted actresses who just goes right for it. She didn’t have any barriers to the emotional connection of our characters. Neither did Jet or I, so we were able to create a feeling of family.”

As for incarnating the wrong “family” element in Danny’s life, Hoskins claims, “To play Bart, I was inspired by several fearful meetings I’d had in the highest circles of film production – and some youthful altercations...I’ve played bad guys before, but never to this extent; Bart is terrifying. He has a creator-creation relationship with Danny.

“Jet is a highly adaptive actor. Sometimes I even apologized after a take because the psychological pressure was so intense. We had a great time together and, fortunately, he doesn’t understand all the nuances of English thug slang...”

Of Leterrier, the veteran actor says, “He was just as comfortable with the stunts as with the drama, which impressed me. You need real pluck to manage a film like this at his age, and he never showed the least doubt. He was always accessible – and he encouraged me to expand on my lines, so I heartily went ahead!”

Li reflects, “Working with these men helped me bring Danny to life. When you’re close to Morgan, you just feel warm; he’s like a father. Bob talks a lot in the movie – and behind the scenes! His acting is so good; he’s very scary as Bart. In person, he is charming and courteous; there was something really shocking about seeing him transform into a tyrant as soon as he heard ‘action.’”

The film’s dramatic and fighting scenes alike are scored by the rock group Massive Attack. Leterrier notes, “The music is a key element of the film, beginning with the Mozart sonata. Other than its role in the story, music needed to be composed for the film – contributing its own particular atmosphere and build its own specificity.

“Massive Attack was very close to Danny’s world. They have a capacity for emotion through melodies that aren’t afraid to also be violent.”

3d, one of the group’s three founders, recounts, “We had never specifically composed the music for a film, although sometimes our songs were used. Louis came to our studio with his film not even edited yet. The images were very impressive, and you could already tell the kind of emotions that the story was going to bring about. The varied and powerful content made us want to be involved. Besides, Danny’s nickname at the start of the film could have been ‘Massive Attack.’”

“Working off the images for three months, we found there’s a big difference between composing freely and composing for a film. When doing an album, we go with its soul and its sensibility. On *Unleashed*, we had to feed its story and its ambiances. The film deals with themes we care about: freedom, the bonds between individuals, and the violence that is sometimes necessary to bring about peace.”

3d further emphasizes, “We didn’t want to settle for simply underlining the action or the sentiments in a systematic way. Our idea was more to grab the spirit of the moment or the characters, and create for them a musical framing that resembled them.

“For certain moments, especially the fight sequences, we composed atmosphere – almost conceptual movements which reinforced the spirit of the scene. For chases, rhythm was essential. For the scenes in which the stakes are more human, we defined melodies that sometimes mixed elements of classical music with contemporary instruments. The score definitely has our stamp on it, but found its inspiration in the movie and reflects the film’s mix of darkness and innocence.”

Summing up the message of *Unleashed*, Jet Li says, “It’s a parable against violence. Violence is not the only solution. I believe martial arts to be like a gun. A gun itself doesn’t mean good or bad. Some use guns to protect people; some use guns to hurt people. Danny has learned to use martial arts, but he doesn’t understand life.

“What’s most important? That you are a good person; that you understand life; and that you know friendship, family, warmth, and compassion. If you know those things, then you can also know martial arts.”

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Q&A with director Louis Leterrier

Q: How did *Unleashed* come about?

A: After their experience on *Kiss of the Dragon*, Luc Besson and Jet Li wanted to work together again. So, Luc dreamed up the story of this man-child raised like an animal, and proposed it to Jet.

As for me, I had just finished *The Transporter* with Luc when he spoke to me about this project. After making a film of pure entertainment, I wanted to do one about a more personal subject that was closer to my world, and *Unleashed* corresponded to that.

Q: What was it about the script that attracted you in particular?

A: The story is an untraditional mix of emotion and action. That's the strength of the film. In bringing them together, the film transcends genres. The film deals with two completely opposite worlds; on one side there is a dark violence and on the other, there is absolute innocence. To explore and juxtapose these two worlds was a real challenge, one that promised interesting situations and remarkable feelings and humor.

Also, I very much wanted to work with Jet Li and Morgan Freeman, who were already attached to the project.

Q: How did you find working with the two of them?

A: Morgan is so impressive; he emanates a calm power that commands respect. The first time, when I met him for wardrobe fittings, I was nervous. But, even more than being remarkably professional, he's very human; we rapidly understood each other.

Jet is not only a world-renowned actor; he's also an icon, a living god for millions of people who know all his films, his physical prowess. At the start, I think he figured, "This guy's 29 years old, so he's only going to say 'action' and 'cut!'" So, right away I instituted a dialogue by talking to him about the way I saw things, how I saw his character, asking him his opinion, showing him my preliminary sketches and notes. He was reassured and a trust was established. We ended up becoming quite close, after testing each other.

The role of Danny is an important gamble in Jet Li's career. For the first time, he acted in a register that he had never before attempted. He had to be vulnerable, emotional,

destabilized, fragile – many characteristics he had never before revealed on screen. A real acting performance had to be added to the physical performance. He incarnates the mix of violence and innocence; he’s the link between the two worlds of the film. He had to be believable as a lethal weapon and as a pure soul who discovers the world.

Q: How did the shoot go overall?

A: It was complex, and I had to reconcile myself and our cast and crew to numerous constraints. The shooting schedule was shortened, but we adapted – without compromise. Jet, Morgan, and Bob all understood the risks of what we were doing and worked hand-in-hand with me. Everyone played along.

Q: Working under pressure and with such talented actors, how do you face the challenges of making a movie?

A: You have to be calm, know what you want, and have prepared as much as possible before shooting. If you’re well-prepared, know how to explain what you want, and create a good understanding among all the crew members, then you manage to do a lot in a day. This was especially true on *Unleashed*, with the mix of genres we had, and because we couldn’t fall behind schedule.

The film is of course made during the shooting, but also a lot during the editing process. Listening to various people’s suggestions allows you to choose the what’s best for the story – and when you have Jet Li, Morgan Freeman, and Bob Hoskins, you have every reason to take advantage of their experience!

Of course, as the director, I have my own vision; I know what each scene must convey, what the characters should do. You also have to feed off of what the actors give you, what they sometimes suggest. There has to be a constant dialogue, and also the ability to adapt. My role is not to lock down but to capture, to catch everything while always keeping a vision of the story as a whole in order to guarantee its coherence.

With Morgan, we had a little game at first. I would have already prepared my scene – the framing and the movement of the characters within the set. But he would question everything, which was actually quite good for me because it kept me at attention and forced me to question myself and to leave nothing to chance. Morgan would always ask, “Why?” or “How come?” If I didn’t have a reasonable and immediate answer, it wouldn’t work for him. After a few days had passed, when he had finished testing me this way and was reassured by my way of doing things, everything went much faster and simpler.

He brought an enormous amount to his character. It was he, for example, who decided that Sam should be blind. Integrating the non-seeing parameter in the frame was difficult, but we were able to do it. Arriving on-set, Morgan would close his eyes and I had to lead him around like a blind person! He fell, he bumped into the camera, but that was part of his method. That way, he was able to modify his movements, to touch more, to be more hesitant, maybe more reflective in his acting and his line readings, with less rough edges

– which suited me, given the difference in size between Jet and he...It's not the Morgan Freeman we're used to seeing.

Q: How did those two mesh?

A: They're a surprising mix. In the best couples, opposites attract! Morgan, playing a blind man, learned from the physical performance of Jet. When it came to diction and understanding the role, Jet was helped enormously by Morgan. Since Jet hasn't mastered English perfectly, he had to know all the other actors' lines to react and respond to them.

But Jet perfectly captured the initial definition of his character, that combination of man, child – and the sense of animal always on nervous alert. On-camera, as soon as Morgan touched his arm, he reacted. Morgan felt that and got a lot out of it.

In the scene where Danny sees Sam and Victoria add his picture to the others and they say to him, "Now, you're part of the family," he cries. At that instant, for Danny, this crucial emotion awakes other things, notably the memory of his mother. As we were about to shoot this scene, Jet confided to me that he'd never cried in movie – nor, in his private life, since childhood. I told him, "Your character now exists, he's been accepted, he's no longer wild, they think of you as family." It was a critical turning point in the evolution of his character; Jet sensed it and knew it, but he still refused to cry. Morgan helped him to take that leap. He held him like a father and helped him to let go of the emotion, to lose control. It was an incredible moment. Jet was really shaken; he was afraid that this image could be perceived as weakness. On the contrary, I think that this scene of emotion will open up new screen potential for him. Those few tears helped him break a barrier.

Q: What about the scene where Victoria kisses Danny? Was that difficult for Jet?

A: It's a strong moment, because Danny is an innocent, but he's not indifferent towards Victoria. These characters behave most often like brother and sister. In the scene where Danny is alone in his bed and Victoria comes to say good night in her bathrobe, she gets close to him and they talk and then she gives him a kiss. It was there in the script. Jet wasn't sure about it, because he'd never kissed a girl in the movies and was wondering how to react, like Danny would have been doing too.

I told Kerry Condon to make as if she might kiss him on the mouth at any moment. She let things fall into place as she played off Jet's embarrassment, and she moved in very close and really looked at him, making the audience discover him as well. At that moment, it wasn't Danny's embarrassment I was filming, but Jet's.

Q: How did you decide to cast Kerry as Victoria?

A: We were looking for a young woman who represented freshness and kindness, without any strong prior definition. We looked a long time, in the U.S. and in England, and it was in Ireland that we found her. Kerry shined right away, through her authenticity

and her naturalness. She *was* the character of Victoria, in that she's a beauty who doesn't know it; she's someone who is very shy, but whose charm is obvious.

Q: And what is Bob Hoskins like?

A: He's great! He's a Rolls-Royce! He came to the project relatively late, but was one of those who brought the most to ***Unleashed***. Since he had done a lot of English gangsters, many pure Cockneys, he knew his character so well. He truly let himself go. He made the lines his own, changing them to make them more believable. Not only did I let him do it, I encouraged him! He certainly did a lot of improvising in the scenes between him and his two henchmen, who let loose in the same way.

For me, Bob as Bart incarnates ultimate evil. He doesn't play Bart as a caricature, so sometimes we even find ourselves believing that he might be able to improve and help Danny. But no; Bart himself is a prisoner of his way of life, condemned to do anything and everything to stay on top. In Bart's world, it's eat or be eaten, and Danny is his life insurance.

On the set, there was always enjoyment in seeing Bob, with his roly-poly physique, shouting at and threatening Jet, who remained frozen and fearful. It was the world upside down! Fortunately, they got along really well, because if Jet hadn't respected Bob, he would *never* have let him treat him that way, even for the camera!

Q: Bart and Sam are both father figures for Danny, in a sense; one is negative, the other positive...

A: I'd say so. Danny is a little bit like those characters who hesitate when faced with a defining choice; on one shoulder is a devil and on the other is an angel – and both are trying to influence him. Bart pulls Danny towards the darkest part of the world, the most violent part. Everything there is about competing interests and shows of force. Sam and Victoria open him up to more constructive and positive values. Danny is caught between the two worlds and must choose. I decided to invert the color codes, so Bart is in white and Sam is dressed in darker clothing. But everyone has their shadowy sides and their bursts of light.

When all three men finally got to play a scene together, it was surreal to shoot. Their three personalities and roles were fused in complete interaction. And that was the first time the three of them had actually met – a great entry point into the material!

Q: How did you finesse the material's drama and action sequences, respectively – and how did you decide to pace them?

A: ***Unleashed*** was not conceived as a series of spectacular sequences with a script only serving as pretext. Rather, it's a strong story in which the intrigue engenders strong sequences. Instead of the dramatic scenes being there only to link the fights together, it's the opposite; the fights serve to move the story forward, which is the real point of interest

here. Danny has a violent side, and the environment he's seeking to break out of won't let him leave. His story is of a man who passes from shadows to light. Through the humanity of those he meets, and through music, he awakens to who he is. It's this story that we all wanted to tell, and it's an actors' movie.

To center the film more on the characters, we eliminated several scenes of fighting and stunts that we had originally envisioned. We dealt with the dramatic scenes with as much care as the fighting and action sequences. For those, when you have Jet Li starring, the bar is set pretty high. The fights were all choreographed by Yuen Wo Ping, who has worked closely with Jet over the years and who supervised the fights in *The Matrix*, with the idea of better defining Danny and driving the story forward. Each face-off in the film has its own significance. We wanted to have fights that were different from the ones we usually see. Danny isn't supposed to have learned the art of man-to-man combat in an academy; he's perfected a savage technique, driven only by the efficiency of his attacks. Nothing about it is aesthetic. By dint of facing his opponents and taking hits, he has learned to feint and he has picked up techniques. He's an innocent who's an expert in only one thing. As soon as he's let go, he charges; then he's able to judge his adversary and adapt to him.

Jet of course worked closely with Wo Ping, who always brings such style and magic to choreographing his combats. As the movie progresses, the higher the stakes for Danny and Bart, the more the tension ratchets up. Early in the movie, the fights are violent and quick, very dark. As things develop further, the fights become more visual. The actors who took part in Wo Ping's fight sequences for *Unleashed* had to know or learn how to fight because the unbroken shots and takes are long, with ten to twelve consecutive strikes, highly choreographed. On the set and when the cameras rolled, we saw things we never would have believed to be possible.

Q: As a director, what do you hope to bring to audiences?

A: *Unleashed* is only my second film as director. On *The Transporter*, technique and thrills were what I had to provide, so I wanted the audience to have a good time while forgetting their problems for an hour and a half. With this movie, I wanted to elicit emotion, from the story and the actors' performances, and to make you feel a lot. Jet incarnates this character who touches us, and who we suffer and hope with.

Q: What have you taken away from this movie?

A: I'm extremely happy with the result. I was lucky to shoot with creative collaborators who gave 200% of themselves, and with – on top of that – several remarkable action scenes. Jet reaches new levels with his work here. I'll remember him as considering everything carefully, being very introverted and at the same time very funny – like Danny. Meeting and working with Morgan, Bob, and Kerry will of course stay with me, too.

Q: And what do you believe to be the film's message?

A: Humanist, and pacifist. It emphasizes the fact that violence is not the inevitable end, that everybody has the right to a second chance. We can break the mold in which we grew up to discover our identity.

But the film isn't all sweetness and light, either. When Danny becomes human again, this doesn't mean that he's lost his capacity to fight; it's that he's learned the difference between attacking and defending. He's learned to choose. It's sort of like the school of life.

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About the Cast

JET LI (Danny)

Jet Li is the rare international film star who is also a world-renowned martial arts master.

U.S. audiences most recently saw him starring in Zhang Yimou's critically hailed hit movie *Hero*, produced by Bill Kong, which was a blockbuster internationally (via Focus Features) and was an Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign-Language Film.

Born Lian Jie Li in Beijing, Mr. Li began studying the art of Wushu (the general Chinese-language term for martial arts) and was enrolled in the Beijing Amateur Sports School at the age of 8. After three years of extensive training, he won his first national championship for the Beijing Wushu team. As part of a world tour in 1974, he had the honor of performing in a two-man fight for President Nixon on the White House lawn. For the next four years, he remained the All-Around National Wushu Champion of China.

Shortly after retiring from the sport at the age of 17, he was offered many film starring roles. He embarked on a movie career with a starring role in Chang Hsin Yen's *Shaolin Temple*. The release of the film propelled him into instant screen stardom and also spawned two sequels.

Mr. Li went on to make over two dozen films in Hong Kong and China. These included such critical and commercial successes as the *Once Upon a Time in China* movies (directed by Tsui Hark and, on the last series entry [*Once Upon a Time in China and America*], Sammo Hung), in which he made the role of iconic folk hero Wong Fei Hung his own and scored his biggest hit until *Hero*; [Corey] Yuen Kwai's two *Fong Sai Yuk* movies, *Bodyguard from Beijing*, and *My Father is a Hero; Born to Defence* (which he also directed); *Tai Chi Master* (directed by ***Unleashed*** martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo Ping, who has also worked with the actor on martial arts choreography for many other films); Gordon Chan's *Fist of Legend*; and Daniel Lee's *Black Mask*. His unbeatable combination of jaw-dropping fighting skills, movie-star charisma, and forceful physical presence in these and other movies captivated audiences worldwide.

In 1998, he came to America to make his first English-language film appearance in a pivotal role in *Lethal Weapon 4*, the final film in the blockbuster series directed by Richard Donner, produced by Joel Silver, and starring Mel Gibson and Danny Glover. He

subsequently reteamed with Mel Gibson to produce the telefilm *Invincible*, directed by Jefery Levy and Tony Ching.

A four-time MTV Movie Award nominee, Mr. Li has also starred in *Romeo Must Die* (opposite the late actress/singer Aaliyah) and *Cradle 2 the Grave*, both for director Andrzej Bartkowiak and producer Joel Silver; James Wong's *The One* (in a dual role); and Chris Nahon's *Kiss of the Dragon* (starring with Bridget Fonda, Tcheky Karyo, and Burt Kwouk), which marked his first teaming with ***Unleashed*** writer/producer Luc Besson.

Mr. Li next stars as real-life martial arts legend Fok Yuanjia in Ronny Yu's *Fearless*, reteaming the actor with Bill Kong, Yuen Wo Ping, and Focus Features (which is handling international sales, excluding Asia, on the film).

In 2003, he starred (and fought) in the motion-captured computer game *Rise to Honor*.

MORGAN FREEMAN (Sam)

Morgan Freeman won the Academy Award and the Screen Actors Guild Award for his performance as Eddie "Scrap" Dupris in Clint Eastwood's Academy Award-winning *Million Dollar Baby*.

One of America's most accomplished actors, Mr. Freeman has given memorable performances on screen, stage, and television.

Born in Memphis, he was raised in and around Mississippi. After graduating from high school, he moved to California and studied dance and theater arts at Los Angeles City College. He made his Broadway debut in 1967 with Pearl Bailey in *Hello, Dolly!*

For television, Mr. Freeman created the popular character Easy Reader on the classic Children's Television Workshop series *The Electric Company*, on which he was a regular cast member. His subsequent television credits include the miniseries *The Atlanta Child Murders* (directed by John Erman) and the telefilm *The Execution of Raymond Graham* (directed by Daniel Petrie).

His stage performance in *The Mighty Gents* earned him a Drama Desk Award, the Clarence Derwent Award, and a Tony Award nomination. He received further acclaim, and his first Obie Award, for his lead performance in the New York Shakespeare Festival production of *Coriolanus*. Mr. Freeman received a second Obie Award, as well as a Dramalogue Award, for his role as The Messenger in the acclaimed Brooklyn Academy of Music production of Lee Breuer's *The Gospel at Colonus*. His most recent stage appearance was as Petruchio in the New York Shakespeare Festival production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, opposite Tracey Ullman.

The role of Hoke Coleburn in Alfred Uhry's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Driving Miss Daisy* earned him his third Obie Award. Mr. Freeman would later receive an Academy Award

nomination for playing the same role in Bruce Beresford's Academy Award-winning film version, in which he starred opposite Jessica Tandy. His performance in the film version also earned him a Golden Globe Award, and the Silver Bear Award for Best Actor at the Berlin International Film Festival.

His many film credits also include Stuart Rosenberg's *Brubaker*; Peter Yates' *Eyewitness*; Paul Newman's *Harry and Son*; Christopher Cain's *That Was Then, This Is Now*; Jerry Schatzberg's *Street Smart* (for which Mr. Freeman received his first Academy Award nomination); Glenn Gordon Caron's *Clean and Sober*; Edward Zwick's *Glory*; Kevin Reynolds' *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*; Clint Eastwood's Academy Award-winning *Unforgiven*; Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption* (for which Mr. Freeman received his third Academy Award nomination); Wolfgang Petersen's *Outbreak*; David Fincher's *Se7en*; Pen Densham's *Moll Flanders*; Gary Fleder's *Kiss the Girls* and its prequel *Along Came a Spider* (directed by Lee Tamahori, and executive-produced by Mr. Freeman); Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*; Mikael Salomon's *Hard Rain*; Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact* (as the President of the United States); Neil LaBute's *Nurse Betty*; Carl Franklin's *High Crimes*; Phil Alden Robinson's *The Sum of All Fears*; Lawrence Kasdan's *Dreamcatcher*; Ed Solomon's *Levity*; and Tom Shadyac's *Bruce Almighty*.

Among the upcoming films that Mr. Freeman stars in are Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins*; Lasse Hallström's *An Unfinished Life*; David J. Burke's *Edison*; Bruce Beresford's *The Contract*; and Paul McGuigan's *Lucky Number Slevin*.

He made his feature film directorial debut with *Bopha!*, which starred Danny Glover and Alfre Woodard, and which has recently been issued on DVD. Soon after directing that feature, he formed Revelations Entertainment, which has thus far produced the NBC telefilm *Mutiny* (directed by Kevin Hooks); and the feature film *Under Suspicion*, directed by Stephen Hopkins, which starred Mr. Freeman opposite Gene Hackman. Revelations recently inaugurated a partnership with Intel to help bring digital entertainment initiatives to the entertainment industry.

In 2003, Mr. Freeman was honored by the National Board of Review with the Career Achievement Award, and also received his Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

BOB HOSKINS (Bart)

Bob Hoskins was nominated for an Academy Award, and won the Golden Globe, BAFTA, New York Film Critics Circle, Los Angeles Film Critics Association, National Society of Film Critics, Boston Society of Film Critics, and Cannes International Film Festival's Best Actor Awards, for his performance in Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa*.

His numerous film credits also include John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday* (for which he received a BAFTA Award nomination) and *Beyond the Limit* (a.k.a. *The Honorary Consul*, for which he received a BAFTA Award nomination); Alan Parker's *Pink Floyd – The Wall*; Francis Ford Coppola's *The Cotton Club*; Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*;

Robert Zemeckis' blockbuster *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (for which he received a Golden Globe Award nomination); Richard Benjamin's *Mermaids*; Steven Spielberg's *Hook*; Oliver Stone's *Nixon*; Nora Ephron's *Michael*; Christopher Hampton's *The Secret Agent* (which he also executive-produced); Shane Meadows' *TwentyFourSeven* (for which he won a European Film Award) and *A Room for Romeo Brass*; Atom Egoyan's *Felicia's Journey*; Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Enemy at the Gates*; Fred Schepisi's *Last Orders*; Wayne Wang's *Maid in Manhattan*; Mira Nair's *Vanity Fair* (a Focus Features release); Kevin Spacey's *Beyond the Sea*; Lawrence Guterman's *Son of the Mask*; Marc Forster's soon-to-be-released *Stay*; and Stephen Frears' upcoming *Mrs. Henderson Presents* (which he also executive-produced).

Mr. Hoskins directed the features *The Raggedy Rawney* (which he also wrote and starred in) and *Rainbow* (which he also starred in), as well as episodes of the television series *Tube Tales* and *Tales from the Crypt* (also starring in the latter).

His notable television credits also include Dennis Potter's classic miniseries *Pennies from Heaven* (directed by Piers Haggard, and for which he received a BAFTA Award nomination), as well as Peter Yates' telefilm *Don Quixote* and Roger Spottiswoode's telefilm *Noriega: God's Favorite*.

At the 2004 British Independent Film Awards, Mr. Hoskins was honored with the Richard Harris Award for Outstanding Contribution by an Actor to British Film.

KERRY CONDON (Victoria)

Kerry Condon will soon be seen starring as Octavia of the Julii in the epic HBO/BBC miniseries *Rome*, the first three episodes of which were directed by Michael Apted.

She was born in Ireland in County Tipperary, and grew up in the small town of Thurles. She then went on to study at the Dublin Theatre Arts School. In her final year there, she auditioned for *Angela's Ashes* director Alan Parker. Two more auditions followed, and she got the role.

Ms. Condon's subsequent feature films included Steve Barron's *Rat*; Goran Paskaljevic's *How Harry Became a Tree*; John Crowley's *Intermission*; and Gregor Jordan's *Ned Kelly* (a Focus Features release domestically).

She became, at age 19, the youngest actress ever to play Ophelia for the Royal Shakespeare Company (in Steven Pimlott's staging of *Hamlet*). Ms. Condon's other stage work includes Wilson Milam's staging of *The Lieutenant of Innishmore* (also for the Royal Shakespeare Company); and Paddy Kineen's staging of *The Lonesome West* (for Liverpool's Everyman Theatre).

For U.K. television, she has appeared on the series *Ballykissangel*.

UNLEASHED

About the Filmmakers

LOUIS LETERRIER (Director)

Louis Leterrier was immersed in cinema from an early age; his father is a filmmaker, and his mother is a costume designer. Even so, Mr. Leterrier first wanted to become a drummer. Later, he decided to pursue movies after all, and made a few short films.

At 18, after garnering some work experience in publicity, he went abroad to study film at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. At Tisch, he learned about different avenues in the movie business, and became the assistant to a professor.

He subsequently met director Jean-Pierre Jenuet, who was looking for French-speaking assistants to work on the production of *Alien Resurrection*, and brought Mr. Leterrier aboard.

Back in France, Mr. Leterrier became Luc Besson's assistant on the shoot of the director's *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*. He again assisted the director on ads and commercials for L'Oreal and Club Internet, among others. His last assistant job was on Alain Chabat's French blockbuster *Asterix et Obelix: Mission Cleopatre*.

In 2002, Mr. Leterrier made his debut as film director, on the action movie *The Transporter*. The film starred Jason Statham and Shu Qui.

He is currently directing *The Transporter 2*, again starring Jason Statham. That film, as with its predecessor and *Unleashed*, is written and produced by Luc Besson; and produced by Steven Chasman.

LUC BESSON (Writer/Producer)

Director, writer, and producer Luc Besson fell in love with the movies at age 17.

He initially snuck onto film sets to watch the filmmakers, crews, and actors at work; then, he joined them, working his way up through the ranks. His early jobs were on such films as Patrick Grandperret's *Court-Circuit*, Maurice Pialat's *Loulou*, and even a James Bond movie (*Moonraker*, directed by Lewis Gilbert). Along the way, he met a young actor named Jean Reno, and finally became a second unit director (on Alexandre Arcady's *Le Grand Carnaval*).

During those years, he was also writing screenplays. A meeting with Pierre Jolivet led to a collaboration on several projects. One of them, a short film, marked Mr. Besson's first effort as director.

Another short followed: *L'avant Dernier*, starring Messrs. Jolivet and Reno. Mr. Besson resolved to expand the work to feature-length, self-producing the resulting movie, *Le dernier Combat*, through his own company, Les Films du Loup. Shot over 10 weeks, in widescreen black-and-white, the 1983 silent science-fiction movie attracted attention around the world and earned Mr. Besson a César Award nomination for Best First Film.

Mr. Besson's next movie was the hit *Subway*, starring Isabelle Adjani and Christophe Lambert. The 1985 film was nominated for 13 Césars, winning 3 (including Best Actor). The filmmaker next wrote and produced *Kamikaze*, directed by Didier Grousset, before embarking on his most ambitious project yet, *Le Grand Bleu*.

Following a 9-month shoot, *Le Grand Bleu* [*The Big Blue*] opened the Cannes International Film Festival in 1988, became one of the biggest hits of all time in France, and established a worldwide following. Nominated for 8 Césars, it won 2.

Mr. Besson's next film, 1990's *Nikita* (a.k.a. *La Femme Nikita*), was an even stronger success (it played for an entire year in Japan) and subsequently spawned both a U.S. remake and television series. The film's leading lady, Anne Parillaud, won the César for Best Actress, and the film received 8 other nominations.

With *Atlantis*, released in 1991, the filmmaker extensively revisited the underwater world he had showcased in *Le Grand Bleu*, but this time with a cast of dolphins, whales, and sharks.

Mr. Besson then traveled to New York City with Jean Reno to make 1994's *Leon* (a.k.a. *The Professional*). Nominated for 7 Césars, he film was a smash worldwide, and introduced Natalie Portman, the film's female lead, to movie audiences.

At the 1997 Cannes International Film Festival, Mr. Besson was represented by two movies. One was his latest film, *The Fifth Element*, which opened the Festival, and subsequently was nominated for 8 Césars and won 3, including Best Director. The other was Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth*, produced by Mr. Besson, which won the Best Actress award (for Kathy Burke) at Cannes.

Mr. Besson further diversified his filmmaking activities by writing and producing *Taxi*, directed by Gérard Pirès. The 1998 action comedy was a huge hit in France, spawning two sequels as well as a U.S. remake.

His next film as director was *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*, which was nominated for 8 Césars and won 2. His next works as writer/producer included *Wasabi*, directed by Gérard Krawczyk and starring Jean Reno; and *Kiss of the Dragon*, directed by Chris Nahon and starring Jet Li.

In 2000, Mr. Besson founded a new European cinema studio, EuropaCorp, with longtime associate Pierre-Ange le Pogam. EuropaCorp is one of Europe's leading production companies, having cultivated activities in movies, television, videos, music, and world sales. The company finances 8 to 10 films annually, and also acquires movies.

Among EuropaCorp's over 30 feature productions to date, in addition to those mentioned above, have been Louis Leterrier's hit *The Transporter*, starring Jason Statham; and *Banlieue 13*, one of France's top-grossers in 2004, directed by Pierre Morel. Currently in production or post-production are *The Transporter 2*, again directed by Louis Leterrier and starring Jason Statham; the new film from Guy Ritchie; *Bandidas*, directed by Joachim Roenning and Espen Sandberg, starring Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz; Brian W. Cook's *Colour Me Kubrick*, starring John Malkovich; and *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, directed by and starring Tommy Lee Jones.

Also in production is Mr. Besson's next film as director, which is EuropaCorp's most ambitious project yet; *Arthur*, a CGI animation feature starring Madonna. He has adapted the screenplay from the best-selling series of children's books.

JET LI (Producer)

Please refer to bio in the [About the Cast](#) section.

STEVEN CHASMAN (Producer)

Steven Chasman formed the production and management company Current Entertainment in 1999. Among his company's clients is Jet Li.

Since starting the company, Mr. Chasman has enjoyed an ongoing collaboration with other key members of the *Unleashed* creative team, on Chris Nahon's *Kiss of the Dragon*, James Wong's *The One*, Tim Story's *Taxi*, and Louis Leterrier's *The Transporter* and just-wrapped *The Transporter 2*.

Mr. Chasman's other projects as producer include Tony Giglio's *Chaos* (in post-production), starring Jason Statham, Ryan Phillippe, and Wesley Snipes; and Corey Yuen Kwai's upcoming *DOA*. The latter is not a remake of the classic movie, but rather an adaptation of the top-selling computer game serial.

Prior to the formation of Current, Mr. Chasman was an agent at International Creative Management. In his six years at ICM, he represented leading actors and directors. He also helped to build the careers of such athletes as Deion Sanders, Ken Griffey Jr., and Dennis Rodman.

Before joining ICM, he was a practicing contract lawyer. He holds a law degree from Emory University Law School, in Atlanta, and had earlier attended the University of Pennsylvania as a graduate.

PIERRE SPENGLER (Co-Producer)

Although based in London and Los Angeles, Pierre Spengler makes movies all over the world. He began his career in the film industry in 1964, working on Edouard Logereau's *Paris Secret*.

From there, he worked as assistant director, assistant editor, and production assistant on such major features as Bryan Forbes' *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, starring Katharine Hepburn; Lee H. Katzin's *Le Mans*, starring Steve McQueen; and Kevin Billington's *The Light at the Edge of the World*, starring Kirk Douglas and Yul Brynner.

Mr. Spengler then joined the Salkind Organization and soon assumed production responsibilities there. He was the executive in charge of the company's extensive and ambitious feature slate, which in the space of a decade yielded Richard Lester's *The Three Musketeers* and *The Four Musketeers*, starring Richard Chamberlain, Frank Finlay, Oliver Reed, and Michael York; Richard Donner's *Superman* and Richard Lester's *Superman II* and *Superman III*, all starring Christopher Reeve; Richard Fleischer's *Crossed Swords* (for which he also co-wrote the screenplay); and Jeannot Szwarc's *Santa Claus*.

Since 1986, he has been working as an independent film producer. His projects in that capacity have included Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (winner of the top prize, the Palme d'Or, at the 1995 Cannes International Film Festival); Richard Lester's *The Return of the Musketeers*, which reunited the original cast; Simon Fellows' *Blessed* and soon-to-be-released *7 Seconds* (starring Wesley Snipes); and Bernard Rose's upcoming *Man with a Movie Camera*.

OLIVIER BERIOT (Costume Designer)

Olivier Beriot has been the costume designer on a number of films for Luc Besson's EuropaCorp. Among these are Gérard Krawczyk's *Fanfan la tulipe*, Ariel Zeitoun's *Yamakasi*, Fred Garson's *The Dancer*, and Joachim Roenning and Espen Sandberg's upcoming *Bandidas*. He had earlier worked as a wardrobe supervisor on Luc Besson's *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*.

A graduate of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Parisienne, Mr. Beriot began his career designing for the stage. He has worked on ballet, opera, and theatre productions all across Europe. His early film work included Robert Altman's *Prêt-à-porter (Ready to Wear)*, on which he was wardrobe supervisor.

Mr. Beriot's films as costume designer also include Brian De Palma's *Femme Fatale*, Alain Chabat's *RRRrrrr!!!*, Frédéric Auburtin's *Volpone*, Michel Blanc's *Embrassez qui vous voudrez*, Florence Quentin's *J'ai faim!!!*, Gérard Corbiau's *Le roi danse*, Jérôme Lévy's *Bon plan*, James Huth's *Serial Lover*, and three movies with director Gabriel Aghion: *Pédale dure*, *Le libertin*, and *Absolument fabuleux*.