

## 47 Ronin

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Alfred Lee writes about 47 Ronin, to be released in November 2012.

Keanu Reeves, Hollywood superstar, has just finished making his latest movie in London. It's an action-packed love-and-revenge adventure featuring giants, wizards, samurai sword fights -- and features a cast which includes many Chinese living in Britain.

Now, Keanu has told me in a special interview for [www.dimsum.co.uk](http://www.dimsum.co.uk): "The next movie I would like to make is a big all-action Chinese kung fu film. It would be a Chinese production, made mainly in China, with the world's best martial arts experts."

I was able to speak face-to-face with Keanu and obtain the "inside" information on his future plans because I was an extra in the film he has just completed at Shepperton Studios an hour from London. It's titled 47 Ronin, a famous legendary story set in Japan in the 1700s, about a band of samurai warriors who go on a mission to avenge the death of their master.

In January this year, I wrote a story for [dimsum.co.uk](http://dimsum.co.uk) saying that I had applied and auditioned for a part in 47 Ronin, along with hundreds of other Chinese living in Britain who had stars in their eyes and wanted to be in a film starring Keanu, one of the world's most popular actors.

A couple of months later, I received messages that I had been selected -- possibly because in Australia, I had taken a year off from being a newspaper journalist to act in the stage play *The World of Suzie Wong*.

In 47 Ronin, I play the roles of a Nobleman (that's me in the red costume) and a Villager (I am wearing the mustard-coloured costume). I spent 10 days and nights shooting the film and before each shooting, I had to spend over an hour with experts on hair and facial make-up to make me look older.

Special sets were built at the massive studios at Shepperton -- including a whole village of rustic stone houses with thatched roofs, a feudal palace with high ramparts, a castle with battlements, an arched medieval bridge, battlefields for horse-riding and sword fights and a giant hall for an important wedding scene.

47 Ronin, with a massive budget of 170-million US dollars, is currently being edited and sound-tracked and will be released in November 2012. It will be in 3-dimension.

Members of the cast I worked with on the film included Chinese from Singapore, Malaysia, China, BBCs and a number of Japanese. They were students, university undergraduates, chefs and waitresses from Gerrard Street, Chinatown, several Masters graduates, a PhD, a university lecturer from Cambridge, financial analysts and wealth management experts, accountants, an energy company engineer and a grandfather from the Chinese Emmanuel Church -- plus some girls who just wanted to see Keanu, winner of a Music TV "World's Most Desirable Man" award.

It was in between scenes, re-shooting film takes and arranging of the sets and props that I was able to speak to Keanu, star of the three Matrix science-fiction films, the thriller *Speed* about a bus booby-trapped with a bomb, the Devil's

Advocate, the Day The Earth Stood Still and 70 other films, nearly all of them highly-acclaimed critically and huge box-office successes.

Keanu told me: "It's been great working on 47 Ronin. I have made many new friends and I like London very much.

"The next movie I would like to make is a kung fu epic, with martial arts action all the way. It's called Man of Tai Chi and there are 18 fights in it, taking up 40 minutes of the whole film."

The script is finished and Keanu wrote almost all of it. He also wants to direct it and hopes to get financial backing from the China Film Group and Village Roadshow, two of the biggest film enterprises in China.

Keanu said: "With the millions of film goers in China and the popularity of martial arts films in the West, there are high hopes for a big box-office success."

Keanu, 46, is of mixed race - Chinese, Hawaiian, Portuguese and British and lived in Australia as a child and was brought up in Canada, where he excelled as a hockey player. He is not married, but has often been seen in the company of glamorous actress and model China Chow, daughter of actor and London and New York blue-ribbon restaurant owner Mr (Michael) Chow and the late, brilliant designer Tina Chow. China's aunt is Tsai Chin, one of the Western world's most talented and famous Chinese actresses, who appeared in the London stage production of The World of Suzie Wong, plus many box-office film successes.

In 47 Ronin, Keanu plays the part of a mysterious British-Japanese swashbuckling expert swordsman who joins the Ronin - so called because they are a band of samurai warriors without a master.

The romantic interest in the movie centres around the love between the beautiful daughter of the Ronin's dead master and Kai, the character played by Keanu. But it's a romance doomed not to blossom, because of culture and tradition.

She features in a wedding which is stormed by Keanu and Ronin, when I was a Villager, standing watching the ceremony. For me, one of the most memorable sights from this scene was a giant -- Britain's tallest man, Neil Fingleton, who stands over 7ft. 7 inches tall (232cm). When I chatted to Neil, straining my neck to look up at him, I found he was a gentle giant, who says that he hopes to get more film and pantomime roles.

During filming of the scene, I was astonished by Keanu's speed and ground-eating Matrix-like leaps and bounds and his skill at wielding, double-handed, a flashing samurai sword. He had no stand-in and there was no camera tricks or digital enhancements.

On the set of Ronin, I saw it was not all glamour, champagne and caviar even for Hollywood superstars.

In one Village scene, I was standing just yards from Keanu after he was captured by two enemy warriors. The story called for him to be thrown face first into a pool of paddy field muddy water. It was done four times to get the angles right and after each occasion, Keanu stood up, dripping wet, wiping the mud from his face. There was no stand-in.

Only after Keanu was pushed into the dirty water a fifth time did Director Carl Rinsch shout: "Cut ! That's a wrap !!"

By Alfred Lee

alfredlee39@hotmail.com