

Tomb Raider Technicalities!

Harness/Bungee/Wire Work

This is highly skilled work and requires levels of skill and strength that don't just come by being in great shape. They are VERY specific to each performance. The harnesses are usually built specifically for the performer by the same company that supplies Cirque De Soleil. Those harnesses have to be tight and figure hugging and this is an advantage in stunt work too as we need to hide as much as possible. Obviously the SFX guys do their job too by painting out any wires in shot.

There are a huge array of techniques used in wire work. The Grand Master of wire work is Yuen Wo Ping who has been choreographing wire sequences on Hong Kong movies since the 1960's. I was lucky enough to work with Wo Ping and his team on the Matrix films and because of those films wire work has become extremely popular in action flicks. The key element to any wire stunt is the moulding of the performance of the person on the end of the wire with the team at the other end doing the pulling. Although air rams are used, good old fashioned man power is where the true art is at.

As for fitness. Well, you had better be in shape to do wire work! Apart from the fact that harnesses are painful and restricting, wire work itself is incredibly demanding. The key areas would be flexibility, core strength in extended positions and aerial awareness. Usually gymnasts make excellent wire workers but even they will take literally days to become comfortable in the harness.

Horses

Horses are not an area of stunts to be taken lightly. In fact, most performers who do horse stunts are usually brought up on horses from an early age and live, eat and breathe them. For some years I was riding every week and have ridden on and off for over 15 years but I am by no means a film horseman. Horses and film sets are a dangerous place and not for the faint hearted. My advice to anyone with horses is to leave them alone unless they are second nature to you. If you really want to do horse work then expect to buy a horse and learn to do everything from big jumps with expensive cameras (and actors!) around to high speed galloping in enclosed spaces and to do this for YEARS!

Swords

To get good with swords and other weapons is simply practice. There is a never ending array of swords and weapons when you take into account martial arts like Wu Shu Kung Fu, Samurai or Iaido, Filipino Kali or Eskrima and more traditional or western sword play like fencing (foil, epee, sabre) and broad swords like the Claymore. Sword and weapons choreography is truly an art unto itself. The greats like Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh make it look like a ballet and that only comes from a lifetime of consistent practice. To get good at this you need to study the arts, take fencing lesson and PRACTICE!

Rifles/Firearms

The primary concern when using all firearms is safety. This only comes with familiarity. When I am given a firearm on set I ask the armourer to show me the weapon in detail and then spend some time loading it, cocking it, checking for stoppages, possible failures to shoot, clearing the weapon and generally getting a feel for it. Anyone firearms instructor will tell you that you need to know your weapon before you fire it. When I first spent some time on firing ranges we spent hours just pulling the gun to pieces and putting it back together then cleaning it before we got near to putting any bullets in it. By the time I did I knew the gun inside out. My advice is to do a good course in small firearms shooting and use as many different types of guns as they will let you get your hands on.

Stunt Training

In Australia, there is really only one place to recommend to get some experience in ALL these areas. My good friend and 9 Times National Blackbelt Champion, Colin Handley runs the Australian Stunt Academy on the Gold Coast in Queensland. Colin has been running this for over 15 years and is an actor and stuntman of considerable merit. I attended the course myself some 12 years ago now. It is a great introduction and when I am in town I go and teach fights or wire work or whatever Colin needs me for. The course is held 4 times a year and Colin has a purpose built centre for all your stunt and outdoor activity related needs. Maybe I'll see you there!

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