

# VENTS

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# Leonard Wu

**Hi Leonard, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?**

I've been good, thank you. At this exact moment I just spent the day hanging out and walking rescued dogs, so I'm in dire need of a shower.

**I was reading through your bio and saw you actually have a BA degree in English. Did you intend to start a career as a screenwriter?**

I think there was a brief moment at UCLA where I had considered it. And when I say brief, I mean like two seconds. The main reason I ended up becoming an English major was because my parents thought that having a somewhat more pragmatic field of study (as opposed to say strictly theater) would be a safer bet for my future, and one of my good friends, who was in the MFA screenwriting program, recommended I consider studying English. So I started taking classes and fell in love with the material, and just became consumed with the likes of Shakespeare and Chaucer, or stuff from the Romantic Period like Wordsworth and Blake.

**What led you to become an actor?**

Acting is actually something that I had always felt like I was meant to do since as far back as I can remember. But growing up in DC, it was just unheard of among my peers and so it wasn't something I really explored. When it was time to go to college, I decided to head out to Los Angeles, as it seemed like the obvious place to start. I think I kind of blindsided my parents with that, but they were supportive. When I wasn't busy studying literature, I was literally doing theater anywhere and everywhere I could all over campus.

**Since your inception into this world you have had the chance of working on very ambitious projects such as the Martin Scorsese produced feature "Revenge of the Green Dragons." What was it like to work on a film of this magnitude and what have you learned from**

**experiences like this?**

So as I understand it, Andrew Lau (the director of Green Dragons) was looking to make a movie in America. And since he directed the phenomenal Hong Kong movie *Infernal Affairs*, upon which Martin Scorsese's Oscar winning *The Departed* was based, they had a working relationship, so Scorsese came onboard to help Lau produce.

For me, this was kind of a dream situation. I grew up on a lot of Hong Kong films and I loved Lau's *Infernal Affairs* as well as his *Young and Dangerous* series. As for Scorsese, well, that's an opportunity to work with a living legend. You'd be a fool to turn it down.

It's interesting because although *Green Dragons* had a lot of pedigree behind it, it was shot in a real raw, run-and-gun, indie sort of way, which you can feel in the movie. It's incredibly kinetic, and what I had learned from Lau is that he never lets his foot off the gas to go below 100 miles an hour. He brought that Hong Kong filmmaking sensibility to America, and I loved every minute of it.

Often times on a show or movie, when you're doing a scene you have to hit certain marks, turn your head a certain way, move your hand that way. It can get very clinical, taking away all the fun and energy. Working on *Green Dragons* was the complete opposite of that. Everything was so quick and fluid, and our DP and his amazing team were just constantly moving around, that 90% of the time I didn't even know where the cameras were. It was like doing theater in the round. What this meant was that I never became self-conscious about where the cameras were. I could stay in the moment, let loose and do my thing. That certainly helped me get into the skin of the character I played, Ah Chung, who is incredibly mercurial and crazy violent.



**Now, you are playing Orus on Netflix's Marco Polo. How does it feel to join the show as a new character for its upcoming second season? Were you already a fan of the series?**

Working on Marco Polo, I got to check off so many things on my bucket list, it was such an amazing and rewarding experience. I've always been a fan of sweeping historical epics, and the canvas upon which John Fusco, the creator of Marco Polo, painted the series was just beautiful. I remember reading his two episode pilot from season one and being absolutely floored. He is truly a modern day warrior poet. Anything and everything that John writes about, he immerses and lives it. He's a master horseman, an expert at martial arts, an accomplished musician. There wasn't one person on the production who wasn't inspired by him, and I felt so blessed to be able to work with him and an amazing team.

**For this season, you got to film in many exotic locations. How did the surrounding environment influence you as an actor and your performance?**

It was huge. I can't emphasize enough how helpful it was to be on location. First off, many of the locations we're at are in the middle of nowhere, so you bond with people from the production. I've formed some lifelong friendships with my cast-mates, the stunt team, people in the costume department, makeup department, etc. And it really is like being part of this team, this family where everyone has each other's backs running this grueling, but rewarding marathon together.

I remember my first day of filming, we were in Hungary, out in the middle of nowhere far from civilization. To get to set, I had to walk through a clearing, and as I came out into the open, my jaw just hit the floor. They had built an entire village and there were giant statues, dozens of horses, dozens of camels, chickens, goats, hundreds of Mongolian extras (who came from Mongolia!) to play villagers. I mean, they had literally built a village. None of it was green screen. All of it was real and practical. As an actor, to be able to perform in such a fashion where everything is so tangible, so completely at your fingertips, it's such a gift.

As John Fusco, the creator of Marco Polo would state, "We're not just making Marco Polo, we're living it."

**Any fun anecdotes from filming Marco Polo abroad?**

Oh, man, there are just too many countless, memorable stories when you're on a production of this magnitude for six months. And it certainly doesn't hurt when the cast and crew is like family to you, and you get to share so many moments together. There is one anecdote in particular that I remember vividly. So I spent a lot of time with Claudia Kim, who became like a sister to me. There was this one moment where we're having this intense conversation, walking through the forest with our horses. I turn to her and I'm

about to say something deep and meaningful, and suddenly my horse, Felho, he breaks out into a loud neigh. The shot is a pretty complicated dolly, so I just hold my position, wait for Felho to stop, so I can continue. But he keeps going. And going. And going. I think he neighed for what felt like 10 seconds. And when he was finally done, everyone just broke out laughing and we had to start all over. That was a special moment, because it was towards the tail end of working in Hungary, and also the last time I worked with Felho who I just completely fell in love with.

And that's kind of indicative of the nature of a production like this where there are so many logistics that the producers, directors, and ADs have to juggle. You're dealing with so many factors that go beyond purely acting, whether it's the weather, or the natural light, or in this instance an animal who is as integral to the scene as you are.

**Seeing that you come from a martial arts background, do you ever get to do your own stunts?**

So basically on a show like Marco Polo, if you're playing one of the warriors and you're not filming, you're more than likely doing some sort of training, whether it be weightlifting, horseback riding, or fight choreography. What this meant was that I got to spend a lot of time working with the amazing stunt coordinator, Brett Chan, and his incomparable Hitz International Stunt Team. What this also means is that, yes, you do indeed do a lot of your own stunts.

I had an amazing stunt double from China by the name of Hua Zhang (the stunt team members from China had nicknames and his was Six Pack...pretty self-explanatory), and we worked extensively together and became very good friends. A lot of the more complicated horseback riding, a lot of the heavy falls or flips, that was all him. The man is an amazing acrobat and I was more than happy to have him come in and do that stuff for me.

At the same time, the producers and directors want the actors to be able to do as much as they can, so I would say that for any given fight, we were trained to be able to do about 85-90% of it ourselves.

It certainly didn't hurt that I have a background in Kung Fu and boxing, so I can generally pick up choreography pretty quickly, but of all that would have been pointless if it wasn't for the fact that we had some of the best athletes from around the world on the stunt team teaching us day in and day out.

**What else is happening next in Leonard Wu's world?**

I've actually been involving myself with another passion of mine, doing non-profit work (thus the walking rescued dogs). And while that's not keeping me busy, I'm doing a little bit of writing, developing and producing my own projects.