

STUNTS, SQUIBS & UPGRADES

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW.



by Michael Scherer

What is a Stunt Upgrade? It's when a non-stunt performer becomes involved in what can be considered a risk performance. Why am I talking about it? Because it is an often misused and misunderstood system.

Before I continue, I would like to say for the record that although I may sound like I'm generalizing, I do agree there are situations where the upgrade is warranted.

Secondly, down the road the producer may tell the Stunt Coordinator, a fellow ACTRA Member by the way, that the stunt budget will not be amended to cover the upgrade. In other words, a card carrying union Stunt Performer will not get a day now because that part of the budget went for an upgrade. Thirdly, the Stunt Coordinator him or herself gets it in the neck from several directions. This can include a reprimand, a flood of emails, and having to explain to ACTRA what happened. This can affect the persons reputation and future work.

That having been said, I have personally witnessed situations where Background Performers or Special Skill Extras (SSE) have conspired to put themselves in a situation that may qualify them for an upgrade. This may include techniques such as going to the ground, embellishing in a vehicle or getting close to something that may be considered dangerous, all done without being directed to do so. The plan then involves waiting a day or two and then filing for an upgrade with ACTRA.

I have even been in a situation where Background Performers who were passengers on a bus I was driving in a shot felt they should get upgrades because a stuntman was driving. Thing is, not every shot was an action shot. They were replaced with stunt people when the situation warranted it. But there was some serious planning going on and they even asked for my name and member number.

Here's the problem. Although a person may succeed at this they don't realize the ripple effects. First and foremost it's dangerous. You may not know the action or FX involved and might actually be injured or cause someone else to be injured. I have personally witnessed extras trying to get close enough to an explosion to get an upgrade. Risky stuff that. An extra decides to fall in a crowd scene and winds up taking down a dozen others or throws off the timing in a car sequence.



Mike Scherer, performing a cable drop on the set of *The Second Arrival* (1998) with Marc Desourdy, Jean Frenette and André Laperrière.

Unless you have been given specific direction to perform something risky, then don't do it. Also, if you are asked to do something you are not comfortable with, you need to speak up. If you are willing to do something more and you feel it's risky in nature, you need to establish that beforehand. Some roles are very action oriented and a little rough and tumble work may be considered a prerequisite for the job. Get it sorted beforehand.

As a side note, a squib is a pyrotechnic device and is a stunt upgrade. There are however some non pyro systems that would not qualify. The flip side is that there are times where we need to bump someone on the spot because of a change in the action or at the director's request. They can be unavoidable and are legitimate situations for which the upgrade was designed. Just think of the repercussions before you take advantage of a self generated upgrade opportunity.



Stephane Lefebvre, practicing, then flipping a car on the set of *Veritas: The Quest* (2003).