

SCI-FACT! Golding's mother, Margaret Likan, is a native-born Sarawakian of Iban Dayak ancestry, while his father Clive is British.

"Can I come down now? It's been an hour."

“ You have to put in the time, you have to put in that sweat ”

ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

New Beginnings

Brit Henry Golding on taking on the role of iconic GI Joe action hero **Snake Eyes**

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THERE ARE FEW BRANDS THAT ARE AS quintessentially American as GI Joe. Which is why it's somewhat surprising to find a well-spoken, impeccably polite British-Asian actor headlining the latest movie in the series, *Snake Eyes*.

There's nothing else like *Snake Eyes* on Henry Golding's film CV. Normally the suave, good-hearted leading man in movies such as *Crazy Rich Asians*, *A Simple Favour* and *Last Christmas*, the action-heavy *GI Joe* franchise was a universe he definitely wanted to be a part of.

"I wanted to do something in this world," he tells Red Alert. "I want to be involved in films that I would want to pay money to go and watch. I had a meeting with [director] Robert Schwentke, who pitched his idea on the take of *GI Joe* that we wanted and I was like, 'This is the type of *GI Joe* film that I would want to make.' There's so much more of a human element to it."

GI Joe is a phenomenon in the States, but was rebranded as *Action Force* in the UK until the early '90s. With Golding having spent so much of his childhood in Malaysia, he was more up on the cult of *GI Joe* than most Brits. "A lot of the ex-pats that I grew up with were Americans and they all had the toys," he says. "So I was kind of jealous of them. When I was in Britain we'd come across the Saturday morning cartoons, but it was impossible to get any toys or anything just because it was such an American IP."

A FEW INCHES OFF ROUND THE BACK

While Golding has often hit the gym before a shoot, *Snake Eyes* took it to another level. For filming before lockdown ("We finished at the end of February 2020, so we made it by the skin of our teeth!" he says), the actor trained for four hours a day for two months.

"There's so much martial arts and so much choreography that you have to put in the time, you have to put in that sweat. It felt great, to be honest with you. Once you're in that zone and once you're sort of enveloped by everything *Snake Eyes*, it's like there's nothing else on your mind apart from making this movie."

Golding has yet to make a sequel, but there's been talk of a *Crazy Rich Asians 2* ever since the first film became a surprise box office smash in 2018. Does he have any insider info on the state of the sequel, or does he rely on *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* for news like the rest of us?

"There's that adage of, actors are like mushrooms, they're just kept in the dark and fed shit the whole time," he laughs. "We have no idea what's happening, but it'd be a shame if they didn't do a follow-up. They're cracking away at the scripts, so I know for a fact that they're trying to plan the next two movies. At what stage they're at, again, I have zero idea. But 100% I'll be there."

Definitely coming up soon is a new Netflix adaptation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* where Golding stars as Mr Elliot, becoming the first actor of Asian origin to play the character. "I think colourblind casting is definitely the norm now," he says. "I mean, we've grown up with all-white casts in period dramas, so why not? It's so normal to see the diversity out in the streets in London or New York, so I think there's definitely been a step forward in that department."

As a prequel, *Snake Eyes* has been planned as a reboot of the *GI Joe* franchise, and the hope is that it will kickstart a fresh run of movies. "It's definitely in the scheme of things," Golding reveals. "There's so much that we can spin



"Hang on, this bit comes out! What's going on?"

off to, with where we end it in this movie. It definitely points to a bigger and exciting future for the franchise."

Golding has enjoyed a varied career in his 34 years: rom-coms, action flicks, crime dramas, not to mention his eight years fronting BBC Two's *The Travel Show*. But before he got his big break in front of the camera he spent two years working as a hairdresser in London – a skill that came in handy during the first lockdown when, four months in, his wife asked him for a favour.

"She was like, 'Get it over with, get your scissors out,'" he says. "I was like, 'Really?' She said yes, and I was like, 'I don't want to do it if you're going to be moody.' Obviously we got into a huge fight about it, but I ended up giving her a very simple one-length."

So, during that first lockdown, with all hairdressers closed, did he ever attempt to trim his own hair? His sole attempt, it seems, made him look like *GI Joe* after a particularly brutal battle...

"I can't do the back, I don't know how people do it," he laughs. "I ended up just nicking my ears with my scissors. I was bleeding everywhere!" **so**

Snake Eyes is in cinemas from 18 August.



Post Office queuing was getting silly.