

## Film

# KILLING TIME...

AFTER three instalments of the John Wick franchise, and with a fourth film arriving in cinemas and a spin-off on the way, star Keanu Reeves has come to know his titular character inside out.

Since 2014 the Hollywood icon, 58, has inhabited the role of the enigmatic hitman who, after pledging to retire as a killer for hire, finds himself in conflict with the high-powered, international criminal underworld of which he was once a part.

In John Wick: Chapter 4, stuntman-turned-director Chad Stahelski returns to tell an action-packed tale of John's battle for his freedom from the clutches of The High Table, a council of 12 crime lords which governs the world's most powerful criminal organisations.

With a multimillion-dollar bounty on his head, it's not just The High Table after John - he must fight off bounty hunters around the world who are trying to get their hands on the huge reward for his murder, all while keeping The High Table's own trained killers at bay.

As you might expect with a talented stuntman at the helm, the John Wick films are all about the action - and this fourth instalment is no exception.

"John Wick's about the pistols," smiles Keanu as I ask him about his favourite weapon of the many his character uses in the film - a huge arsenal which includes nunchucks, swords, glass... pretty much anything he can get his hands on.

The Matrix and Point Break star has built a reputation for doing most of his own stunts, a trend which continues in John Wick: Chapter 4.

"Love the training, love the choreography, lots of new stuff," he says of the new film.

"I got to get back into cars, doing some drifting - some 180s, a 270 - got to learn some nunchucks, I loved those.

He continues: "I guess I do probably like 86%... 90% of the interactions, the fighting. But then, in

## KEANU REEVES AND HIS JOHN WICK CO-STARS TALK TO RACHAEL DAVIS ABOUT THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTION THRILLER FRANCHISE



Director Chad Stahelski (left) is at the helm again and Laurence Fishburne (centre) also returns to team up with Keanu (right)

terms of stunts, there are stunt people doing that...

"So they're getting hit by cars and they're jumping out of windows.

"There are some cool cats, very talented people doing some of the super-hard stuff. Not hard, but like, extreme. Real danger."

Like its predecessors, the fourth John Wick film is as exhilarating and fun in its action as it is serious and realistic, where necessary and appropriate.

Toeing this line is important to Chad, 54, who says that the blend of entertaining action and serious peril is essential to "the overall tone of the movie".

"You want to have fun, but we want you to kind of take it a little bit serious," says the director, who was Keanu's stunt double in 1999's The Matrix.

"I think it comes from a lot of the old Buster Keaton [movies] where we like showing extreme stuff, but at the same time you let the audience off the hook. It's like, you know, tension: you build it up, and then you give 'em a quick laugh."

John Wick: Chapter 4 is full of

jaw-dropping stunts. Chad draws on one in particular: a scene which sees John tumble down the hundreds of steps which lead to Paris's Sacre-Coeur Basilica.

"Ten steps would have been real, and 20 steps would have been a little serious, but 100 steps is fun, but it's ultimately much, much harder," he says.

The film sees the return of characters like Laurence Fishburne's The Bowery King, head of an underground intelligence network; Ian McShane's Winston, owner of the New York Continental Hotel; and his loyal concierge Charon played by Lance Reddick, who died suddenly earlier this month, making this one of his final film appearances.

"I'm just glad they made another one," says Ian, 80, of returning to the John Wick world.

"I remember making the

Another returning star is veteran Ian McShane who plays Continental hotel owner Winston

first one and everybody was there because it was a tight, independently written script on its own, some good actors in it - you had Michael Nyqvist, you had Willem Dafoe, you had all of us doing character parts. I think that was it, it was just a one-off, really tight, fun film, you knew it was going to be pretty good.

"But it came out a year later and suddenly they say: 'By the way, we're thinking of making another one.' And suddenly, it's 10 years later and we've done four of them.

"I'm just glad that Chad has directed them all, because I think they've got better and better and better. It wouldn't have been the same with another director."

There are also plenty of new characters, such as Caine, Wick's longtime friend who must turn against him when The High Table threatens a family member, played by Donnie Yen; the Table's sadistic emissary, the Marquis, played by Bill Skarsgard, and Akira, the daughter of the Osaka

**ACTION STAR:** Returning for the fourth time as the titular hitman, Keanu Reeves, left, says John Wick is all "about the pistols"

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Continental Hotel's proprietor and concierge of the Japanese hotel, played by musician Rina Sawayama in her film acting debut.

Fresh off the back of her acclaimed second album Hold The Girl which was released in September 2022, Rina says she "had a lot of anxiety" coming into her first feature film experience, as it was a demanding shoot which saw her tackle complicated fight choreography and stunt training.

Despite that, the UK-based Japanese star says she has "been completely spoiled by doing this film first" in her movie acting career.

"Honestly, I felt so looked after," she continues. "It was an honestly amazing first movie, I can't complain."

Having now played John Wick in five films - including the upcoming spin-off Ballerina - Keanu is a master of the character's physicality.

The star says filming the film's epic climax at the Sacre-Coeur was "good and intense and fun" - a fitting finale, then, for this thrilling fourth film.

"Lots of drama," adds Keanu. "Lots of mistakes. Lots of consequences."

■ John Wick: Chapter 4 is in UK cinemas on Friday