

The Editor's Cut - Episode 063 - EditCon 2021: Thrills & Chills

Michele Conroy:

I love cutting horror, especially ghost stories and thrillers. It is magical in the edit suite when you can cut it. There's so many ways to cut it.

Jeff Barnaby:

As an indigenous storyteller, it's a space that it seems to be we relate to the most. That's why I gravitate towards it because I can integrate my stories in there in a way that codifies them for a non-native audience.

Dev Singh:

There's so many sub-genres in horror, too.

Michele Conroy:

Yeah.

Dev Singh:

As you were saying, ghost stories. And as Jeff is saying, there's so many variations that you start to play in and mix together when you're cutting them. They're so much fun.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello, and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast, and that many of you may be listening to us from, are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met and interacted. We honor, respect and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today.

We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action. Today's episode is part five of a six-part series covering EditCon 2021 that took place virtually in February 2021, editing dark genre and feature film. This past year has brought our lives no shortage of fear-inducing moments, and yet, films that offer us frights continue to be one of the greatest escapes.

In today's episode, join editors Michele Conroy from *In the Tall Grass*, *The Silence* and *Mama*. Jeff Barnaby from *Blood Quantum* and *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. Dev Singh from *Incident in a Ghostland* and *Backcountry*, and moderator Erin Deck, from *Rabid*, as they share their sights into crafting successful films that both entertain us and play upon our fears and anxieties.

Speaker 5:

And action.

Speaker 6:

This is The Editor's Cut.

Speaker 7:

A CCE podcast.

Speaker 8:

Exploring, exploring, exploring the art.

Speaker 7:

Of picture editing.

Erin Deck:

Hello, I'm Erin Deck. I'm joining you this morning from Toronto, and acknowledge that we are on traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Hi, everyone. Just briefly, Jeff Barnaby, Michele Conroy, and Dev Singh, our editors, welcome. Thank you for being here. I'm going to be just a little formal for a second, and I'm going to introduce our panelists properly.

Dev is an accomplished film and television editor. He holds a BSc in biochemistry from Queen's, attended Ryerson Film Studies program and was a resident at the Canadian Film Center. He is one of only three editors ever named in the yearly Playback magazine 10 to Watch. His credits include the acclaimed Backcountry, People of Earth and Picture Day. In theaters and festivals soon is Cinema of Sleep, Spiral, and currently, he's working on the Resident Evil reboot. Hi, Dev. Welcome.

Dev Singh:

Hi.

Erin Deck:

Hi. Michele is an extraordinary film and television editor. Her work has earned multiple awards, including for Mama, Pompeii and Splice, which was produced by Guillermo del Toro and directed by longtime collaborator, Vincenzo Natali. Other collaborations with Natali include an ensemble romance, Paris, je t'aime, Nothing, Getting Gilliam, and most recently In the Tall Grass. Other theatrical releases include Little Italy, The Grizzlies, and Ginger Snaps 2: Unleashed. Her TV credits include Vikings, Penny Dreadful, Flashpoint, and This is Wonderland.

I would also like to point out that when Mama was released in theaters in North America, it was the number one film, so that's awesome. Hi, Michele. Welcome.

Jeff was born and raised on the rural Mi'kmaq Reserve of Listuguj, Quebec. A multi-disciplined artist, he has won several awards for his artwork, poetry, short stories, music and films. His work provides a bare knuckle view of the post-colonial Mi'kmaq life, defining stereotypical treatments of First Nations narratives by using horror and sci-fi tropes to explore themes of violence, gender, race, and indigenous futurism.

His 2010 short film, File Under Miscellaneous, was nominated for a Genie Award for Best Live Action. In 2019, Jeff premiered his sophomore feature, Blood Quantum, at the Toronto International Film Festival, as the opener for Midnight Madness. So hi, Jeff.

Jeff Barnaby:

Hi.

Erin Deck:

Yay. I'm super happy that we're all here. I think just to get us in the mood, I'm going to read just three quick horror quotes. Okay. This one's by Wes Craven. "Horror films don't create fear. They release it." This one's by Stephen King. "I recognize horror as the finest emotion, and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify. And if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross out. I'm not proud."

Then this last one's by Guillermo del Toro. "When I'm watching a horror movie with other people, and there is a jump scare or tension, you all react at the same time. It's beautiful, it's very connecting. It's very empathic. There is a joy in being scared. I love that there is a community experience in watching a horror movie." I love those quotes. Okay. So my first question is just going to be an easy one to warm us up. I'm just curious how all three of you got into editing horror movies?

Jeff, I know that you write and direct also your films. But so when you started, did horror films, was that just the jobs that came or did you actively seek them? How did you get into cutting horror films? Dev, I'll start with you.

Dev Singh:

Yeah. I did a short film while I was at the CFC and it got the attention of Adam MacDonald, who was the director of Backcountry. I went for an interview for Backcountry and he just sat down and said, "Hey, this isn't an interview. You're my guy if you want to do this movie."

I had done all the research and everything, and I was all ready for it. That never really happens, so I was like, "Yeah. All right, this is great. Yeah, love to do it." And so then we got into it. That started it really.

Erin Deck:

That's amazing. That was the same way it happened for me with Darren Bousman. I hadn't cut a feature before and we just went for an interview, and he just wanted somebody who liked to talk about horror and liked horror movies as much as he did. I had some editing experience, but it was just kind of like do our personalities work together?

Dev Singh:

Totally.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. Michele, what about you? Did you seek out horror movies or did they seek you out?

Michele Conroy:

They sought me out. I was doing a lot of TV and then this one producer, who's working with Copper Heart said, "Vincenzo Natali's looking for an editor." And she arranged an interview and took off from there. He and I just hit it off as soon as we met each other. And then Steve Hoban from Copper Heart offered me Ginger Snaps 2. I realized I really enjoy cutting horror.

I love, love cutting horror, more so than drama, more so than comedy. I love horror, it's fun. It's fun when you're in the edit suite and you can just create something you don't even know in a scene that doesn't even have a jump, but just suddenly you can create something like that.

Erin Deck:

There's fun. You have a good time with horror. Even if you're dealing with sometimes some more serious moments, there's a bit of a joy in cutting. Hearing someone scream, you almost block that out and just like, "Oh, that's a good scream. Oh, that scream's better. Or that stab actually works a lot better than that stab."

So Jeff, how did you start? Because I know that you write, direct, and edit. Was it something that you always just moved towards?

Jeff Barnaby:

It was always due to financial necessity. I cut my first film in school and it just progressed from there, where I was doing music and all the stuff you mentioned already. I had a pretty good honed artistic sensibility and it was easily transferable to the editing process. I already had a really keen sense of timing because I'd been doing music forever. I had a really keen sense of organizing my thoughts. So it just seemed like a natural progression to do all this artwork and transfer all that skill into cinema. Then it just made sense to take all that other sensibility and apply it to editing.

There's an interesting byproduct of being Mi'kmaq is that there's no editors out there that knows Mi'kmaq, so nobody's going to be able to edit that material anyway. I ended up having to do that regardless. So it became I'd say, "Well, why don't I just do it?" And then as I was doing it, I began to realize that there's a language, there is a definitive, native cinematic language to editing that other people don't really get. It's a lot about embedded storytelling and disjointed narratives. This goes way back, thousands of years to oral storytelling traditions.

When you think about telling a story orally, you're telling a story and you never stick to that linear point. You'd be talking and you'd go, "Oh, you remember Larry, Larry from way back when? He used to pump gas over at John's place." It's all over the place. That's what attracted me to editing was taking that sensibility of indigenous storytelling and applying it to something that hasn't been around as long as that tradition has. It becomes a new form. So as a native storyteller, of course, that was super exciting to me and being a native filmmaker. Then it just became about the energy to do all of that shit.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. I guess that going into film because of your music, and poetry, and short stories, it's just another venue to explore. I guess it keeps progressing.

Jeff Barnaby:

The space between music, and imagery, and sound is pretty negligible, so you're editing all that stuff. Everybody thinks of us as just image editors, yet 90% of our timelines are going to be sound. It's like you get three bars of editing images and you get 50 sound tracks. I don't think anybody really, particularly with horror editing because so much of our jumps or our tension is built from sound. You look at something like Ginger Snaps, the first one, where they have that scene where they all get trapped in the dark.

There's no image there. It's just sound. You're editing sound in that closet where you're hearing that werewolf footage. It's horrifying, but you don't actually see anything. Then your talent, you become a musician. Sure, you don't know how to play any instruments, but you know the rhythm of sound, you know the rhythm of music in order to apply the images.

Erin Deck:

You're absolutely right. I feel that horror editing really does rely a lot on being a sound designer and a music mixer because it all plays together in one.

Jeff Barnaby:

The only other genre that could probably contend with it is musicals, where you need to be on point with every image you edit.

Erin Deck:

Absolutely. No, absolutely. And going off of the tension, it's interesting because I was thinking about this. I was thinking a lot of the great movies have different emotions, but horror films really rely on tension and use a high level of tension. There's this director, he once described tension as an elastic band.

I guess my next question is I'm curious, how do you guys know how far to pull that elastic band? And when to stop and be like, "Okay, I've hit it. That's the perfect amount of tension." Michele, do you want to start with that one?

Michele Conroy:

It's hard to say. Usually, you need an audience to know or just test screening personally.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Michele Conroy:

Actually in the project I'm working on now, I cut it very loose. Then the process, you keep on pacing it up, pacing it up. The last pass you watch it, and it just was the same rhythm through the entire film. There was no air. I just realized I took all the tension out of this one scene and we have to add four seconds here, three seconds there.

Erin Deck:

I love that you use the emotional response from an audience how to craft that tension, because you have amazing experience in cutting tension. You're right. A lot of horror, like the Guillermo del Toro quote, you have to see it with somebody.

Even if it's your assistant or somebody comes in, you're like, "Can you watch this?" Sometimes they don't even need to say a word and you can see how they're reacting.

Michele Conroy:

That's exactly it. You know the feeling. You're watching it. Even when the director watches the cut with you for the first time, you're like, "No, that's off. I need to open that up. Or you know what? I know it's off here. I have to add frames here or trim it there."

Erin Deck:

Tension is a hard thing to fully know if you've gotten it right. Dev, do you feel like when you're cutting footage that when you're alone in your room, do you just put it together, and I think I got this? Or do you wait until maybe you can screen it with somebody?

Dev Singh:

No. Part of it's intuitive. You just feel a rhythm. You're trying to do it a little bit different. Part of it is you're thinking about what you had done before, and so how that plays into the particular scene or section that you're doing, I think. And then just overarching things. It's like tension is the precursor to conflict. So if you think of it dramatically, you're like, "Oh, how can I stretch that out?" I remember hearing Joe Walker say a similar thing that you were saying, which is a bow and arrow thing, and how you release it, and when you release it.

I think a lot of it is fun with surprise. They give you set ups, something where a person walks into the back of the frame, when you're in a long shot or a moving master or whatever. Then the next time, you hold that same shot with the audience's expectation that it comes from there. Then you bait and switch them with the other side. You're playing on intention, the things that you've done before, a little bit of surprise. Then it's like everyone expects it, so you get used to that expectation and then you change that on them. That's the fun part if you play into that expectation and turn it.

Michele Conroy:

Yeah. It's cutting and it's not cutting when you expect to cut.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Dev Singh:

Exactly. It's fun to do this where like Jeff was talking about, which is that you're just changing timing and you're using your own inner timing.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. Jeff, you were going to add to that?

Jeff Barnaby:

I was thinking about a movie like *The Conjuring* and *The Conjuring* is a fucking masterclass intention, the whole thing from start to finish. And for me, it was what Dev was talking about is that you need to know the destination in your head. There's nothing to feel tense about if you don't know that something is awry.

So they set up this opening of the doll. From that point on, you're just horrified about what's going to come around the corner. The great thing about it is the only thing that dies in that whole movie is the dog.

Erin Deck:

Oh, my God, you're right.

Jeff Barnaby:

So the idea of violence or the idea of any real threat is almost all psychosomatic in that there's something going on in the house, but he's just being an asshole. He's not really doing anything real sinister outside of terrorizing the family. And everything happens there off screen. Everything is just, it's such a brilliant setup of how to do tension. It really is about the destination. Once you set the tension,

what they did with the opening in *The Conjuring*, then you could just mess with it. And that's what they do the entire time.

It has nothing to do with that doll, but they already put it inside you and you just maintain it. So you just sit there in that creepy house, making all those weird noises and shadows in the background, and the occasional wipe of a person going back in the background. This is all classic stuff. You can go all the way back to *Caligari* to see some of this stuff happening. And there's a lot of classic stuff in horror, the frame just abhors negative space, so the classic thing, right? The classic scene is seen in every horror movie.

Somebody opening a refrigerator door and blocking out that fucking hallway, and what's going to happen when you close it. So it's really just an extension of that idea of setting up there's something amiss going on, and just riding it out through the whole film. Really horror is about great openings. It sets the tone.

Erin Deck:

Yeah, I agree. I feel like those first few minutes of a horror film, they really set up. And when Michele was deciding which clip to use, I was pushing for the opening of *Mama* but she didn't go with that one, but that's okay. The opening to *Mama* is from the first frame. Then it's five minutes of just, you don't blink, and it's tension all the way through. Then that sets it up because I'm not going to talk too much about *Mama*, like I know it like Michele does, but it sets it up for the rest of the movie. You've got that in you now. Like you were saying, you've got that fear, you've got that tension. Jeff Barnaby:

One more thought about that. I'm sorry, I keep thinking about *28 Weeks Later* and the way they set it up there. It's a microcosm of what I'm talking about, because how do they introduce that tension in the first place? You're in a zombie apocalypse, but everything seems cool, they're cooking and everything's chill. Then you hear a bang at the door, and that kid shows up.

And from that point on, that scene is what's coming after next? Then it's just a rapid fire assault on your senses. It's the best zombie opening in the history of cinema and I don't think it'll ever be topped. It's exactly that. It introduces the idea and follows up with technique of master filmmakers.

Erin Deck:

This is our hour of Sunday morning horror talk and I love this. I was working on a TV show and it was a drama, but they had a Halloween episode. And this Halloween episode, they gave it to me because they know I love horror. I had cut it in a way that I emotionally responded to. As a horror fan, I liked the way I cut it. But then a person came in and they were like, "Well, no, no, you didn't follow the rules to horror." And I was like, "There's rules? What rules am I supposed to be following?"

And they were like, "Well, you have them seeing that thing before we see them see it. And you're supposed to have them stay on their face to get the reaction and then show it." I was like, "Yeah, but I don't like the reaction of their face." They were like, "Doesn't matter, you got to stick to the rules of horror." I was like, "Aw, I don't like that." But it's interesting how some people believe that you have to cut horror a specific way, but I don't feel that way. I feel that it is your gut, your emotion, and then also how an audience respond.

When you guys are about to start a horror film, cutting it. Let's say it's either going to be a slasher, or a zombie, or paranormal, do you research that genre? Do you take in as much of that genre? Do you watch a lot of the horror movies so that when you go into it, you feel more prepared? Or do you just trust in your knowledge, and editing ability, and experience? Jeff, do you want to start that one?

Jeff Barnaby:

I delve in and watch everything for two reasons. One, they might do something that works that I can steal. Two, they might do something that I'm doing that it looks I'm copying. There's a fine line between those two things, but I've learned to walk it. I try to figure out all the things that people are... I don't do this as an editor, I do it as a director. I'm like, "Well, if it works for them, we could do it for us but with Indians." That's the way I approach my films. But when it comes to doing that, composing stuff, I start as a director and make my way to being an editor.

I try to make my job as an editor as easy as possible. I think I do that by just being well-informed. I think it doesn't hurt to walk in with all the tools and accoutrements you have to fight your fight. I watch everything and that's exactly what I did for Blood Quantum. Not that I hadn't seen every zombie thing that came along already, but I reiterated everything. There were some things that we did, I don't know if you guys saw the film, but there was a movie called Irreversible. There was a scene in there where this dude gets his head caved in with a thing.

I edited a whole reel together of scenes like that from films that I had been watching to show the crew as inspiration. I put together a hit reel for my crew, along with I put a watch list together for crews that include stuff like that. So not only do I expect it out of myself, I expect it out of the people I work with too.

Erin Deck:

That's cool. I love that idea that you immerse the whole crew in it, so that when they are shooting or when they're doing something, they are also part of even just that energy that's on set. Michele, what about you?

Michele Conroy:

I do the opposite. No, I won't watch a horror film or a film that's related to it, but if a director wants me to then I will. I will watch all the directors' work just to see their style and their rhythm. Also, In the Tall Grass, Vincenzo, the hallucination sequence he wanted., He referenced an episode from the reboot of Twin Peaks. I watched that over and over to get the rhythm. I will reread the script over and over. As you know, it's more about getting to know my dailies inside out.

Jeff Barnaby:

You work off the script while you're working?

Michele Conroy:

Yeah.

Jeff Barnaby:

You do? That's interesting because once we shoot, I never look at the script again, ever. I'll never look at it again.

Michele Conroy:

But you're the director too. I get it. No. And then as you know, with any filmmaking and any genres, the script is written three times, everyone knows that. Written when it's directed, it's a new story. And when it's edited, when we cut it, it's another story.

Yeah. No, I try and be true to the script, but it always changes by the time you're three months into the cut, the story changes completely most of the time.

Erin Deck:

A lot of times, directors really want to see a cut that reflects the script so that they have a base to work off of. But Jeff, I totally get why you don't need to because you've written it, you've shot it. It's so in your head that you don't need to see a script.

Jeff Barnaby:

It's almost, you're so familiar with it, that you resent it. Then you really want to like, "How can I change all of this stuff? How can I make this more interesting than what I had on a page, which is 30% there?" So it's how do you extract what I started with versus what I have? When you talk about doing horror films, one of the things you're leaving out is typically they're pretty cheap. So you're having to compensate by hiding stuff and you do that through edits, and you do that to a large extent, through post.

And for us, we *really* underestimated the amount of money we needed. We were a million dollars short and we were daily cutting stuff, huge plot points that were just getting tossed out the window. I don't think a non-director editor could have done that because I was literally cutting stuff before I even made it to the editing suite. Trying to figure out in real time on set, how can I make up for what I just did to my script?

Erin Deck:

Right.

Jeff Barnaby:

So by the time we got to the end and there was so much of the script that wasn't there, all the solutions became editorial and post solutions. That's how some of the animation got in. There was things that we needed to do that couldn't include going out and shooting more stuff, and making up for the stuff that we lost because of budget.

That's where your job as an editor really, really starts to become integral and it's not just I'm cutting the script together anymore. It's like I'm trying to unfuck all the things that they screwed up on set. I'm saying this as a director, that was my experience with dealing with the on set stuff.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. I totally get that. So Dev, before we go to your clip, I'm just going to ask do you watch anything? Do you immerse yourself before you begin a horror film? Did you watch all the Resident Evils before?

Dev Singh:

Yeah. Actually, I'd seen a couple and I even worked on one of them, but Resident Evil is different because it's reinventing it. It was more about getting into its world. I watch the directors' stuff just like Michele. Then I kinda just watch my own things. I think I read the script in the town for at least Resident Evil had this First Blood feel.

So I was like, "Oh, you know what? I'll watch First Blood." And so I'll start to do things that are completely different than anyone in that same world expects. Hopefully, that gives it a little bit of a different flavor. That's kinda where I go a little bit.

Jeff Barnaby:

Here's a question for all of you as horror editors. Do you ever get tired of looking at that imagery over and over again?

Michele Conroy:

Always.

Jeff Barnaby:

Does it desensitize you? If you see a head getting cut off 50 times, does it matter anymore?

Dev Singh:

Yeah. The gore doesn't get to me anymore.

Michele Conroy:

I laugh.

Erin Deck:

You watch it over and over again, and you start looking for the technical. You're like, "Did that blade really slice through that bone perfectly? Oh, the blade kind of wobbled." You don't see it. I'm going to shift us into our clips section of this, and so we're going to start the first clip of Dev's.

[clip plays]

Erin Deck:

This film, it's pure horror. Every moment is dark and creepy, and there's so many really fun jump scares in this film. Especially at the beginning of that clip, you think she's in a dream because she wakes up, and there's a wolf and it barks, but she doesn't react to it.

So you're kinda all lulled into like, "Okay, we're going into a dream sequence." And then right away, there's a jump scare. I noticed that throughout this film, there's quite a few jump scares. Was it a lot to take on or just to keep these jump scares feeling fresh, because they do; they land really well. Or was every jump scare planned and executed right, so that it was an easier job for you?

Dev Singh:

No, this was a really hard job, actually. The first one, because the director, Pascal Laugier, who's French new extremity OG guy. It's the first person that I've ever worked with that has their history in front of them. So he did *Martyrs*, so everybody in this particular world knows *Martyrs*.

Jeff Barnaby:

Shit, man. This is exactly what I was going to say is this reminds me so much of *Martyrs* and I couldn't figure out why. Now that you say that, wow. Okay.

Dev Singh:

Yeah. That was you're going in and it was cool because when we interviewed, he had somehow seen Backcountry. He interviewed me in on Skype because he was already back in France, and he was like, "So do you want to do this movie?" I was like, "Okay, sounds good." He goes, "We'll put you up in Paris." And I was like, "Okay, this sounds amazing. I'll get to work with you." And then I was like, "Yeah, I don't know that I'm actually quite ready for this job." I haven't done anything this kinda extreme before. It's a really dark story, but I was up for it.

I was supposed to show after six weeks the rough cut of the film. When I went in, I was like there'd been a previous editor on it that had done the assembly. I watched about 10 minutes of it and I was like, "I know this guy, he knows Martyrs' feel and stuff, so it didn't have that tone." I didn't want to color the approach that I was going to take because you can't help yourself. I think I'm like everybody else, probably a little lazy, is that I'll look at that and I'll go, "You know what? That is actually pretty good. I'm going to take that and start from there."

I asked him if I could start it all on my own. And so he said yeah, sure. I would watch the dailies then cut a scene. Then he had waited like a month before we'd even gotten into this, so he was really chomping at it. And to your point about earlier, like working the beginning, we had worked the beginning for six weeks. We only got to 24 minutes after six weeks. I thought I was going to get fired, for sure. I was like, "That was wonderful. I was in Paris for six weeks. I'm going home." Then the producers came in and they were livid, right?

He was great because he just backed me up. We showed them the first 24 minutes and they went nuts. They were like, "Oh my God, this is terrifying." Because we fine cut it. We spent six weeks fine cutting for the first 24 minutes, losing stuff, getting it together. And by then that's kinda an opportunity you get to get into the person's head space. Then I just watched the dailies for a couple of hours. He shot 40 days in one location too basically, so you can imagine the amount of footage that you have to go through to try and figure that stuff out.

I put the scene together in an hour and then spent six hours doing sound. He would look at it and go, "Hey, that looks pretty good. Let's do sound." So then I'd be like, "All right, here we go." You're reversing stuff, slowing it down. We would go find YouTube's of, we create the voice for the character. Obviously, once the real sound guys get into it, it embarrasses all the work that you've done. But like Jeff was saying earlier in the show, you just end there.

Erin Deck:

But you have to do that work.

Dev Singh:

Absolutely and that's how you get the scares. You start to build them. And then each of them, when you do a follow, how do you focus on a certain thing? This point is actually the climax of the second act. It's actually a 14 minute scene and it really has that like a Martyrs' feel to it.

It's weird because I realized once I was watching it again that oh yeah, this is just this tiny little section of a massive thing that you've been building for 35 minutes.

Erin Deck:

It's so true. Yeah. When I had watched the whole film, because we were talking about what scene, and we had talked about a few scenes, but I had watched the whole film. Then when this scene lands, it's so effective. It's so effective because it feels like the film just keeps doing this.

It's interesting when you remove it from that trajectory that it still stands out amazingly, but the impact, it's not lost but it does lessen a bit. When you watch it on its own, you're like, "Oh, they don't get it." They don't get how people who are just watching the scene on its own. They're like, "No, no." By this point, your mind is like, boom, because there's also a twist.

Dev Singh:

Yeah. All the shots are echoes of shots that either come up or were before. As you're building it, you're like, "Oh yeah, I remember why we went there." But at first, I would sometimes look and go, "Oh, why did we do that? Oh yeah, right."

Erin Deck:

When I was watching that scene, I noticed that there's a lot of angles and I'm like, "Wow, this looks like a lot of footage." That made me laugh when you had earlier said that he had shot so much and even just this one location.

It looks like a lot of footage to put together and so I'm curious, was there a lot of creating it in the editing room? Did you just have a bucket of just footage to work from, or was it thought through by the director and the script?

Dev Singh:

Yeah, it's thought through. He knows what he's doing. He is talented at this world.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Dev Singh:

That was a real privilege to be in the hands of somebody. But that having been said, we created everything. It was just we cut out stuff, there was never a plan. There was never like, "Oh, this is how it's got to be." It was always looking at everything, trying and finding a new way of saying it. Trying to tweak characters and getting them to feel a particular way about each other and building all that stuff. And then it's funny, how I approach it all, is just I approach it like drama. I don't think of it in any other way than that. Then it's the timing that's horror. You just bend the content a bit.

Erin Deck:

Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, content. But that's a really interesting approach. It is, it's a nonstop film and it was really fun to watch. So our next clip that we're going to watch is Jeff's from Blood Quantum.

[clip plays]

Erin Deck:

Jeff, this film is so beautiful and it looks amazing, and there's such a realistic feel to it. I loved it. The animation is such a wonderful addition to it. I'm curious, I love this style, so I have a couple questions about the animation.

First off, was the style always what you were going to do or did that just develop as you were in the editing room?

Also, I wanted more animation just because it was so good and it was so entertaining. I'm curious, was there a thought process on where to put the animation in the film, and did you remove some, did you add some? I guess let's just talk about the animation, because it's such a strong element as well of the film.

Jeff Barnaby:

The animation was always supposed to be there, but it was supposed to be specific to an embedded story within the overall arc of the film, where the old man tells a bedtime story to a young boy in the compound about how he gets his sword. It's a flashback of him getting his sword, the samurai sword in World War II, because the film is set in the '80s and he's a World War II veteran. He's been selling these antique swords as a way to make his grocery bill. So when we got the budget, saw that there's no way you can afford the animation. It was, how are we still going to integrate it?

It became act bumpers and spatial placements that added to the scene. Or in this case, the old man, I didn't want him to die at the end and the way we shot it, when I looked at the footage, it was like, "Well, it looks he's dead." So it was, we needed to figure out a way to both stay vague about the idea that whether or not he's alive, while at the same time presenting it as if he survived. It was such an innocuous area to operate in, that it just made sense to do the animation. We're working with Daniel Gies from ED Films and that guy's a *genius*.

He's one of these mad genius animators and we hit it off right away because when I walked into his office, it looked my office. He had his drawing pad there, he had his music stuff everywhere. It was like he was a multidisciplinary artist, so we spent half the time talking about music. So that's how that came about. I wanted to show that scene because, that scene on that particular day was a shit show. The whole thing was brutal. We were supposed to shoot on the dock, but it was too windy so that got tossed out.

That means every storyboard that we did, gone. Then the stunt that was supposed to happen up on top of that monolith, it was the same thing. It was like we can't do it because it would just blow the stuntman off. And then it became a matter of a 10-year flood. You can't really see it in the clip, but the whole area flooded. So that set that we were using, where the zombies were able to run up to the monolith, if you actually cut forward a little bit more, you'll see that entire area is surrounded by water.

So it was a matter of cutting around the snow that was there in the morning. It was a matter of cutting around the flood. It was a matter of cutting around the fact that the zombies we shot, we shot two days before. It was all this stuff that we had to cut around that wasn't there prior, just a couple hours before, so that's what that was.

Erin Deck:

You wouldn't know, you wouldn't know. It fits together so wonderfully. You did a great job.

Jeff Barnaby:

That's it. That's the magic of editing. That's really only... So I was looking at it, I was having traumatic flashbacks, because I had the exact opposite of Dev in that we probably had about three shots to use, plus the B-roll. So we had three shots to cut with, plus the B-roll, to make that scene, and that was the entire film. I've been in the same position as Dev too, where I cut this 24-hour doc and they show up with 70 hours of footage. It was a 24-minute doc with 70 hours of footage, so I know what he feels like.

In a way, it's worse, because when you have just a handful of shots, there's only so many ways it can go together. When you have a ton of footage, the sky's the limit. I think that's what I was looking at

there, was just trying to get all those shots to jive in a way that made something. It wasn't easy. Plus the music, I did the music there too. It was like it's a fun scene because it works. It works as an editor because you're using everything. You're using music, you're using all the footage you can get your hands on.

And we really did, we used *everything*. When I was talking about it yesterday, or I forget when we were doing our pre-interview. When I talked about Michel, the DOP just randomly shooting shit on the shore. That's exactly what I ended up using for that entire final scene. It was just like... you talk about it being a survival movie, it really was, in the sense that we barely survived it. We had to stop filming because we ran out of money. I had to cut the movie that we had, fly to Cannes, sell that, and come back, reshoot that whole scene six months later, and recut it with the rest of the material that was already there, that we had shot the year before.

Erin Deck:

That's crazy.

Jeff Barnaby:

It is crazy. They don't really tell you that as an editor, but when you are director-editor, there's nobody there with any kind of common sense to speak any, you know, "Maybe there's an easier way to do this!"

Erin Deck:

It was interesting because a lot what you said, was a lot of my thought process about it because being the writer-director-editor, you take on a lot on your own and you don't have that. A lot of times the editor, director, are such great sounding boards off of each other. It's like, "How can we make this work and how does that...?"

And you're not in it alone, but you kind of were. And so it's really interesting to see how you developed that over, now I know, over a span of time because it looks really great. Also, I was really happy that you didn't kill the grandpa, because when I saw the zombies going on him, I was like, "No." I was like, "I accept it because it's a horror movie," but I was sad. I was sad.

Jeff Barnaby:

You have to be there for the sequel.

Erin Deck:

Amazing. Can you just tell me about how you did the transitions from live action to the animation? Because they're pretty seamless in the film. And was that again, while you were shooting, was that thought out, so that once you got into the editing room, you knew that they could just fit together, or was it something that developed in the editing room? You're like, "Okay, this is where I want the animation to start."

Jeff Barnaby:

It's such a long, really...that alone could be two hours of just talking. Because really what I'm doing in the space of being an indigenous filmmaker in a predominantly non-native space, is I'm trying to figure out via vis-a-vis being an editor-director, what the indigenous narrative looks like on screen.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Jeff Barnaby:

A lot of what I'm doing is trying to figure out how I can shoot transitions to help me integrate either stories from the past, or animation, or anything else. Because if you've seen my prior films, this isn't the first time I've integrated animation. And we did it there, we did it, we drew it right into the book. I shot the book. We used that as a transition. The same thing with the opening of Blood Quantum, we shot the ground, knowing that I was going to have that pregnancy was all going to just dissolve from animation to real time.

So really, it's overwhelming sometimes being an editor-director, but I can count at least 10 times where I've been on set where I've pre-cut a movie in my brain. One of the famous scenes from Rhymes was another issue of we didn't have enough money, and I wanted to do a "Let's introduce everybody in the party" like Goodfellas. Let's do that and we'll have an introduction. We couldn't do that because we didn't have the money. It's like we fucking literally don't even have enough lights to light that, so figure it out.

I'm sitting there, it's like, "Well, how do we do this?" So what I did was I told the DOP, and we did it in probably two seconds. I said, "Let's hook up the mask to the camera and let's take two shots. Let's get everybody coming towards the camera, talk to Devery's character sitting at the desk." And when you're looking at it, DOP is like, "What the fuck are we doing? We're just panning, this makes no sense." But when I got to the edit, I took both versions of the shot, I combined them. It made it look like the mask didn't move, while everybody else came flooding towards the camera.

I figured that out six to seven, eight months before we actually sat it down and cut it. So it was like things like that really help. Then for that particular scene, it was they were supposed to come out with a bunch of survivors. We had them there, but it was like we ran out of time, we can't shoot it. So we again had to figure out how to shoot all that stuff. We lost our deck, we lost our survivors. It was like we were making it up as we go along. And I was cutting it as I went along, knowing I needed this, I needed that. We can cover it with a lot of handheld integrating shots.

Erin Deck:

It is amazing.

Jeff Barnaby:

It's a handbook on how to be a director, writer, composer with no money. That's was that was.

Erin Deck:

It's a beautiful film. I really love it. I'm going to now jump onto Michele's. We're going to do a clip from Mama.

[clip plays]

Erin Deck:

The first time I watched it, you know as editors and filmmakers, you watch a film and you're like, "Oh, I want to cut there," or "Oh, they did that." I didn't do that with this film. The editing was so seamless and the tension just stays at such a level. It's a wonderfully put together, cut film. I was just like, it was really good. Michele, you did such a beautiful job on it.

I was curious, it's funny in that, I've seen Mama a couple times. But when I got the clip, and we were talking about it and I watched the clip, my headphones were dying on me so I watched it without sound.

The pacing, it's so strong that I was like, "It works, the scene without even dialogue, sound effects music." It works so well because the cuts are just right at the right spot. I'm curious, because I know that you enjoy working with sound effects and music. I was Michele's assistant editor for three years so I know her work process. And I also know that you really enjoy playing some things really quiet. When it came to this scene, did you first start it off very quiet, or was music and sound effects a part of the scene right from the beginning?

Michele Conroy:

It's funny that you mention that. Actually, watching this clip after all these years not watching, seeing the film, I felt we shouldn't have had music at the end. I felt it should have been dry, just with sound design. That's what I tend to do too. Even the project I'm working on now, I put in too much music, wall-to-wall music.

And when you strip it down because there's a lot of sound design. You have creaks, you have the light bulbs flashing. It's just even the atmos, and the kids playing. I think that would've been much stronger without music.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Michele Conroy:

I use this clip because there's another scene where Jessica, walking down the hallway, she hears something. So this was cut differently. When I assembled the cut, I realized they were almost identical scenes, the way they were cut. So this one, I couldn't cut to her walking down the hallway, but I just thought we'd stay on her back and follow with her. And also, because I overcut the scene and then as the process goes, I pull more and more shots out. When we go around the horn, when the kids are looking at the closet when she's about to open the door, I overcut that sequence, that bit.

So when I watched it I thought, "What if we just stay on Jessica down to the door and then back up to her?" Because people are probably expecting me to cut to her, the kids again, expecting that cut and it's when not to cut. To me, that's what's difficult, because especially if you've seen these scenes over and over, you just want to cut, and cut, and cut, and take the air out. That's just why I selected this clip because nothing really happens. It's just what is about to happen, we're not sure. And you do see mom in the closet after in another scene.

Yeah, but actually it's the sound design, which I thought was as in any horror film, it's really it's half of the film. Yeah. I don't think we should have music at the end watching it. I just think we should've stripped it.

Erin Deck:

Isn't it interesting when you watch something, when you're so far removed from it, how you're just like, "Oh, that could have been better." But I think that's so great also, just as editors, you're constantly evolving and learning. And so I know that with Vincenzo Natali, he loves to do storyboards, and he's very strong at storyboards.

I know that for *Splice*, every scene was storyboarded out. I'm curious, do you actually enjoy that? Do you enjoy that a director comes so prepared with storyboards, especially into the editing room? And like, "Okay, I have to follow the storyboards." Or is it irksome being like, "Let me just feel the footage with the storyboards?"

Michele Conroy:

It depends on the director. Some directors have storyboards and you're like, "No. No, we can't cut it this way." Vincenzo, he has a vision. He knows his script. I trust his storyboards because they do cut together. Even Andy with *Mama*, he's an artist just like Vincenzo. Vincenzo was a storyboard artist before he started directing. They have a good vision. They come well-prepared.

I have other directors that'll have storyboards, and they don't shoot the storyboards, which is fine for me. I think with an action sequence though, you do need it storyboarded. And you cut according to the storyboard and then it changes, it evolves once you're in the edit suite, and you string it together, and you're sitting with the director. But Vincenzo though, his storyboards we do go by it a lot. Yeah, we follow his storyboards. That's the rule.

Erin Deck:

They could be artwork. He did storyboards for *In the Tall Grass* also, I assume, right?

Michele Conroy:

Yeah. He had very detailed. But the first opening *In the Tall Grass*, we changed completely because it just took too long for them to get into the grass. We lost this whole brother and sister argument that just went on and on. We just like, "Get them into the grass right away."

Erin Deck:

That's amazing. You wouldn't know with that movie that you guys cut anything out, because *In the Tall Grass*, the brother-sister relationship, it's there. I like that you guys did get them into the grass sooner, but it's so funny. That's the joy of editing is when there's all of this footage or scenes that you remove, then you just have to make it seamless.

Michele Conroy:

Well, as you were saying, the opening of a film. It was like, "This can't be the opening of our film. It's just not strong enough." It's happening on the film I'm working on now. You got to work it, as Dev said. I'm working on this opening scene. I've spent so many hours on it, and it's only two minutes long.

Erin Deck:

Right.

Michele Conroy:

I hope it stays.

Jeff Barnaby:

There's six scenes in a movie that you work on the whole time.

Michele Conroy:

And you know I'm going to be working on this scene until the very end, until the day before lock.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. And then sometimes like you said, when you're removed from it and then you watch it back, you're just like, "Oh, I could've done that just a wee bit better." When I watch the opening of Rabid, I'm just like, "Oh, I wish I would've cut it just *slightly* different." I'm like, "Okay, that's fine."

Jeff Barnaby:

Well, you never really finish anything as an artist. You just put it down.

Erin Deck:

No, it's so true.

Dev Singh:

That's right, that's right.

Erin Deck:

I can't think of something that I've cut that I've watched later and went, "Yeah, that's solid."

Jeff Barnaby:

I've had scenes like that in my movies, but not a whole movie. No.

Erin Deck:

Yeah.

Michele Conroy:

I usually can't watch my stuff. I can't watch it again.

Dev Singh:

No, me neither.

Erin Deck:

Oh really?

Michele Conroy:

Yeah. I cringe.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. You know what? I think about it and that's true. I don't know if I've ever seen any of my films after the fact, which is so interesting.

We're starting to wrap up I see, but I'm curious, do you love cutting horror? Is it what you would prefer to cut, and direct and write for Jeff? So Dev, do you love cutting horror? Is it your main thing?

Dev Singh:

I mean I love editing, so it doesn't really matter what it is. But, the great thing about horror is, particularly kinda given this time, it's one of the last bastions of real cinema, so you get really great shots.

Jeff Barnaby:

Amen.

Dev Singh:

And images that you can really play with. Sometimes when you're in a drama or something you're like, "Oh yeah, I get this."

Jeff Barnaby:

Two people talking!

Dev Singh:

But in horror, you're like we get it, totally. And it's like, this is cinema you know? And that feels great to cut. That's why I like genre so much. Genre is just a blast to edit.

Erin Deck:

I completely agree. I love it. Jeff, you agree, I assume?

Jeff Barnaby:

As an indigenous storyteller, it's a space that it seems to be we relate to the most, so that's why I gravitate towards it, because I can integrate my stories in there in a way that codifies them for a non-native audience.

Erin Deck:

Yeah. Michele, what about you?

Michele Conroy:

I love cutting horror. I do. I do, especially ghost stories and thrillers. Really, it is magical in the edit suite when you can cut it. There's so many ways to cut it.

Dev Singh:

There's so many sub-genres in horror, too. There's just, as you were saying, like ghost stories. And as Jeff is saying, there's so many variations that you start to play in and mix together when you're cutting them. It's so much fun.

Jeff Barnaby:

It's the bastion of the existential crisis that we're going on to right now. There's no better genre besides science fiction and horror to articulate the insubstantial-ness of the things we fear right now. Horror and what else?

Erin Deck:

No, you're absolutely, you're absolutely. And on that note, that is all we have. Honestly, I have 10 more questions that I had for everyone that I wanted to ask, but we're at the end. That was super awesome.

Thank you to Dev, Michele and Jeff for joining us. Thank you EditCon for having us. And honestly, if you guys ever want to do this again, we could just Zoom and talk horror, any Sunday morning. All right. Thank you, everyone.

Michele Conroy:

Thank you.

Erin Deck:

Have a great Sunday, everyone.

Jeff Barnaby:

Thanks. Thanks for having us.

Erin Deck:

Bye.

Michele Conroy:

Thanks. Bye.

Dev Singh:

Bye.

Sarah Taylor:

Thanks so much for listening today, and a special thanks goes out to Jane MacRae and Alison Dowler. This episode was edited by Alex Schead and Karen Alec. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Virtual music created by Chad Blain and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao.

The CCE has been supporting Indspire - an organization that provides funding and scholarships to Indigenous post secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca or you can donate directly at indspire.ca. The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry and we encourage our members to participate in any way they can.

If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and tell your friends to tune in. 'Til next time I'm your host Sarah Taylor.

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