

FIRST FRAME

British
Film
Editors

CRAFTING THE MOVING IMAGE

SPRING 2023

Award Winning...



Invisible...



EDITORS ALL!

Masters...



and a Special Guest.



Rethink black and white movies. Yes, they are old but the best are also *classrooms*...

"Editors have different styles, attitudes, opinions and approaches. Editors are people, not machines; we don't just push buttons, we bring a lifetime of emotions and thoughts and experiences to every edit."

Roger Nygard



RENÉE EDWARDS
CHAIR

Hello BFE Members,

Enormous congratulations to the winners of the Cut Above Awards! Great thanks to our host Raphael Rowe, our guest hosts and all the nominees, to everyone who makes this possible by sponsoring, contributing to the production and events, to those who vote, watch and attend. It's wonderful celebrating the art and craft of editing, and to experience and witness the scale of support in our editing community.

It's particularly exciting supporting editor networking evenings in Bristol and Manchester. We also partnered with our music library sponsors and others to create hugely popular social events, panel discussions with film composers, and with editors on their use of music, and we

started our online talks with other departments. We had a perfect night in Soho in conversation with Paul Machliss and our *First Frame* Editor, Alan Miller. This was filmed and is available on the website with around 70 online editor interviews.

Our mentoring programme is progressing with pairings throughout the year. Adobe has come on board as a sponsor and we held an event with 55 attendees and we encourage drama editors and editors who want to experience working in a different genre to become mentees. At the heart of what makes BFE special is you, our members. We see increased inclusion of the BFE post nominal. Thank you to all our full members who include the letters BFE in your credits. It reminds the industry of our craft and the calibre of our editors. BFE's governing body and team are committed to support and listen to you, our members and to further our craft. Thank you again to everyone who makes BFE possible. It is my pleasure to be your Chair.

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From The Editor



Hullo everyone and welcome to another *First Frame*. I have been uncommonly busy this year with two feature docs back to back. I am surprised I made my own deadline this time (I need to rechristen the words 'spare time'). Enough self-back patting. My sincere thanks to our guest contributor, Roger Nygard (of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* fame). His superb book, *Cut To The Monkey*, on editing comedy, also contains editorial nuggets of wisdom which are well worth sieving for. He has been gracious enough to offer me an extract from his next book to publish in this issue. Quotes from Roger also spring up all over the magazine in blue. I hope you all enjoy it and the first person who e-mails me the titles of five movies made before 1970 that they have seen and loved (with a few lines on each saying why) gets an 8mm Bolex Camera pin as a prize. Yes, dear members, it's come to bribery. Include your address... Onwards!



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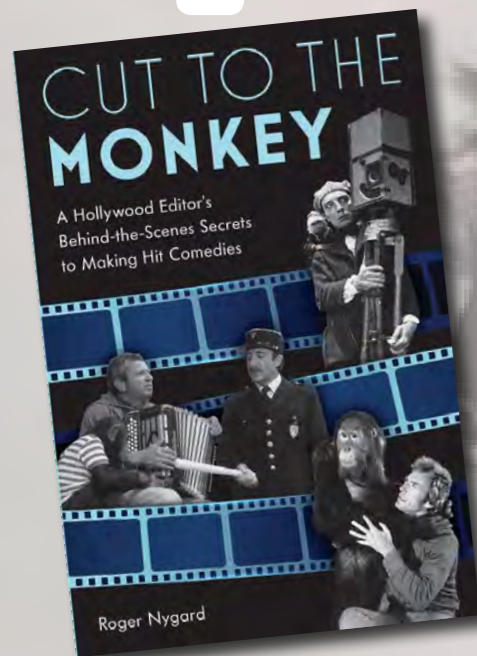
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"I hate every chimp I see, From chimpan A to chimpan Z..."*

CUT TO THE MONKEY

A Hollywood Editor's Behind-The-Scenes
Secrets to Making Hit Comedies

by

Roger Nygard

Book Review by Cornelius Galen

Don't be misled by the specificity of the sub-title. *Cut to the Monkey* is a gold-mine, a veritable treasure trove (as Jeff Shaffer says in The Foreword) of wisdom from the experience of an editor who found himself specialising in comedy. Roger Nygard had the right attitude from the very start of his career. Like most of us, he began his industry experience on the bottom rung, in his case on the Paramount lot as a messenger and worked hard to become the best messenger the studio had ever hired. If you are on the first step of a staircase, if you don't keep leaping up to get a handhold on to the next step, no one's going to notice your desire and ambition and help you work towards it. His path, while never smooth and fraught with potential missteps and both flavours of luck, was carefully navigated. Assistant jobs slowly but naturally transformed into editing jobs and Roger found his niche in comedy where he excelled. Observing the role of editor as a de facto writer, Roger diversified further in order to broaden his knowledge because nothing helps an editor more than being a well informed and well-read human being. He also directs but that cannot be a surprise. Most editors know what's needed to make a film or TV show work. Whether they have the social skills to pull off that job is another matter entirely. Roger seems more than gifted in that rarefied area too.

"So what ways are there to evaluate the elusive art of editing? Here's the first sign of a good editor. The editor must tell a producer or director the truth. Everybody else may be dancing around it throughout production but editing is where reality is faced. The editor is the one who has to tell the directors what they really have so together they can fix it." R.N.

Roger and I (the preferred movie title perhaps) are of the same generation and therefore a lot of what speaks to him, speaks to me. We have the same formative years buffeted by pop-culture giants like *Star Trek*, James Bond and Disney. Given this, it's easy for me to be sympathetic to his aims in writing this book but while he talks about the secrets of comedy, he also imparts many brilliant insights that apply to editing in general. It feels like he's showing us *The Chachapoyan Fertility Idol* (yes, I do my research, don't faint) from the opening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and almost offhandedly mentions the careful steps he had to take to acquire it. Brush off the tarantulas, don't step on the loose stone, swing across an abyss, daintily chose your steps and then guess the idol's weight at the dais, replacing it deftly with a bag of sand... And when the entire edifice falls about your ears, run away with desperate purpose... Those steps are where the wisdom lies.



In the first part of his enormously entertaining book, Roger barrels through a who's who of North American comedy, their own wisdom and tastes revealed as examples of the many different approaches funny people take in plying their trade. In case you are wondering why I stuck the rather clumsy 'North' in the last sentence, it's because I recently worked with an Argentinian who bristled quite rightly that the north of the continent has stolen the name for itself. When a North American says "God Bless America!", I'm pretty sure Peru, Brazil and Venezuela etc. are far from their thoughts. Just a little bit of consciousness raising... Can't hurt. Sacha Baron Cohen observes that two people may have polarised views on a dramatic film they both just watched but if a comedy makes them both laugh, there's no better indicator of a shared moment of truth. Like bravery, spontaneous laughter can't be faked. Well, maybe by the very best actors...

Roger dives into the editor's philosophy in that "You can be an editor of films but it's better to be a filmmaker who edits." There's a lot more on that topic in the rest of the magazine. In essence, the more you know, the better you are at your job. He underlines that editors are writers in the sense that if something isn't working in the scripted lines (be it performance, line reading, emphasis etc.) if you cut it in, you are not helping. You have to be able to judge as a writer would judge or, more pertinently, a re-writer. In my own experience, I was asked to assemble a first episode of a series based on the written notes of the director (still in the field a few flights away) having seen the rushes once. The words "catches himself on barbed wire" were written to indicate a baboon (enough with the monkeys!) had left a clump of hair as he passed under a fence. I was asked to cut this into a sequence. It took no time at all to view the shot that was taken from a good telephoto lens distance away. In the shot you could make out the baboon but not the tuft of hair the sequence relied on. Throw it out. Find another way. Don't waste time.

"Many of your decisions will be overturned. The editor's goal is to get the person on the couch out of the room as quickly as possible. You can't get precious about any choices. Nobody cares why you did something that is not working for them." R.N.

A canard of the creative arts is that everyone has a novel inside them. The response in this cynical age is usually something along the lines of "Yeah, but they shouldn't write it." Roger is forthright about what might inspire us to create new stories. While you may not think you have any talent as a writer, you are a human being with experience and life lessons learned on the job, the job of actually living. And remember something I quote alarmingly often... In Stephen Sondheim's Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, George the artist has artist's block. "There's nothing that's not been said," he wails. His level-headed and smart girlfriend responds with "Yes, *but not by you, George.*" Whether the subject has been done to death or any situation that elicits groans, find your own take on it and suddenly originality peeks from under that rock of cliché. War is hell, yes. But you'll find quite different artist's takes on warfare in *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon* and *Paths of Glory*...

Finally Roger focuses on the editorial detail, the nuts and bolts if you will on editing comedy. A lot of these tips apply to all editing so don't pass this book over if you're not involved in comedy. It's an essential read for anyone who wants to broaden their editorial horizons and comes highly recommended.

*God bless *The Simpsons*, Season 7, Episode 19, *A Fish Called Selma*, written by Jack Barth

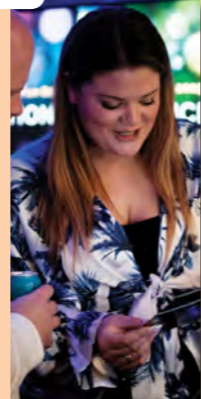




Nominations Night

Thursday 2nd February 2023

For the Winners
see page 64



BEST EDITED SINGLE DRAMA
Nominated

Sponsored by **Adobe**

BEST EDITED SINGLE DOCUMENTARY or NON-FICTION PROGRAMME
Nominated

Sponsored by **BamMusic**

BEST EDITED SERIES ANIMATION
Nominated

Sponsored by **Ray Russell composer**

BEST EDITED SERIES COMEDY
Nominated

Sponsored by **UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION MUSIC**

BEST EDITED SINGLE ANIMATION
Nominated

Sponsored by **NO SHEET MUSIC**

BEST EDITED CURRENT AFFAIRS
Nominated

Sponsored by **gmpm grey man production music**

BEST EDITED BRITISH DRAMA
Nominated

Sponsored by **HIRE POST WORKS**

BEST EDITED BRITISH DOCUMENTARY or NON-FICTION PROGRAMME
Nominated

Sponsored by **MOLINARE ESTABLISHED 1973**

BEST EDITED SERIES DRAMA
Nominated

Sponsored by **TWICKENHAM FILM STUDIOS**

BEST EDITED SERIES DOCUMENTARY or NON-FICTION PROGRAMME
Nominated

Sponsored by **GARGANTUAN MUSIC**

Michael Johns Award for Outstanding Assistant Editor
Nominated

Sponsored by **TELEVISUAL**

Chris Crookall Award for Breakthrough Editor
Nominated

Sponsored by **salon**



IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

Time To Consider Making Your Own Film

by

C.B. De Miller

“Make that film – I mean it! I believe the best way to excel as an editor is to be a filmmaker first and then find your speciality, whether it is as production designer, wardrobe supervisor, writer, producer, cameraperson, sound designer, editor - take your pick, but be a filmmaker first. You have to master the language of film which exists in the service of story. You are investing in yourself, and like any good investment you must diversify.” R.N.

In Roger’s and my own humble opinion, an editor becomes a better editor if they are a filmmaker who edits. My humble opinion is only one eight billionth of an opinion based on current world population estimates which makes it astronomically humble but that doesn’t diminish the wisdom of learning all you can about the craft. When I was growing up in the days of film and, regrettably, Gary Glitter, there were no more romantic words in any vocabulary or language than ‘Independent’ and ‘Filmmaking’. As good friend and filmmaker Chris Monger said in his introduction to his independent film **Voiceover**, “As Laurie McFadden said years later ‘Back then there didn’t seem to be anything more exciting than just putting a roll of film in a camera.’” Well our ‘cameras’ are pre-loaded these days and only physical hardware memory can force a ‘magazine change’...

There was an ad in the cinema back in 2019 with children enacting a giant battle in the snow (Google Snow Brawl Ad). It was super slick, beautifully shot with swooping camera moves and dynamic and highly effective editing. It was one minute and thirty five seconds long and strangely did not outstay its welcome as most ads do. It had a strictly adhered to underdog narrative in which the younger vanquishes the older (a cliché even I’m getting tired of). Try as I might I could not work out what product was being advertised. I must have blinked and missed the first title over the first aerial which gave it away. Still none the wiser, I saw that no boot, glove or article of clothing was ever front and centre and the only constant objects throughout were precisely aimed snowballs. On the big screen, it looked absolutely wonderful. What dropped my jaw was my eventual realisation seeing the words ‘The highest quality video on a Smart phone.’ It had to be Apple.

it was shot on an iPhone 11. The deuce you say!



We are now, at time of writing, on the iPhone 14 Pro Max. God knows what else will be possible by the time you read this in March/April 2023. They may eventually come with their own built in crane (with chairs).

Some smart YouTuber commented:

“Shot on iPhone with pro cinematographer and extra camera gear so... buy our phone even though it takes pros to get this.”



The next comment revealed that the director was David Leitch (**John Wick, Atomic Blonde, Deadpool 2, Bullet Train**). That’s what we call stacking the deck. This is the same as a world class tennis player hawking rackets hinting at how well you may play using the same tool they use but knowing you won’t. Smoke and



mirrors. We are privileged to live in an age where we have the technology to shoot our own films *in our pockets*. Our desktop and laptop computers are essentially miniaturised post-production facilities and there is nothing, *nothing but our own unwillingness*, to stop us creating a calling card film, short or feature, if we were so inclined. In my own experience, despite being confident I could do this myself, the amount you learn is like gold dust forever sprinkled during production and post. For starters, you are

immediately sympathetic the more you find out about what conditions your crew have to put up with. You realise very quickly what nature can do to enhance and torpedo your efforts, how a single crew member (probably working for nothing plus expenses) of a small crew can lower moral and make the endeavour more difficult than it really has to be. Learning on the job is the best kind for this reason; you bring your own solutions to bear on a problem and you don’t just rely on someone else’s handed down from another project if you are that lucky to start with. In short you make yourself vulnerable to failure and therefore a magnet for learning and solving problems. Being a filmmaker only makes your editing better. But what came through from my experience (more on that in Autumn’s *FF*) was how much my feet ached after directing all day. No wonder we have chairs on set.

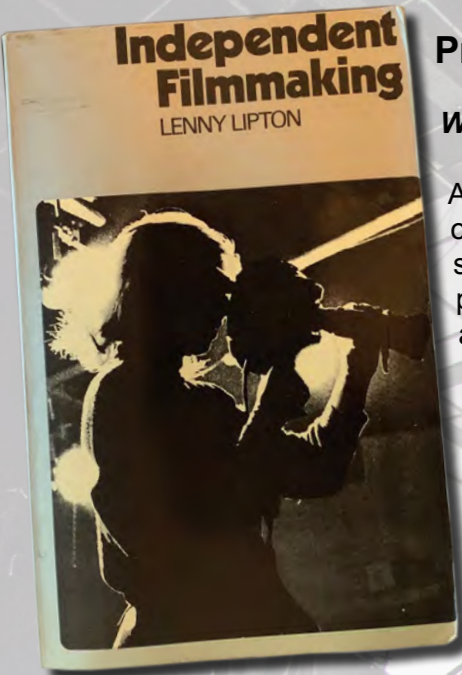
How hard can it be? OK, perhaps you don’t consider yourself to be a writer but you have stories and ideas and if you already edit, you know how to tell those stories. You don’t have to dive in at the feature end. What’s wrong with a beautifully crafted five minute short?

Making any movie requires the talents of the following crew. If there is a craft not on this list, it’s because no-budget filmmaking can just about do without them as much as I would love to make a properly budgeted film with all roles professionally filled. No disrespect at all intended.

In last December 2022’s *Sight and Sound* magazine, there is an excellent double page article by South Korean writer/director Lee Chang-dong in which he gives ten tips for aspiring filmmakers. I strongly urge you to seek it out. I would make moves to try and get to reprint it in *First Frame* but I suspect that will involve a lot of time, a lot of emails and a lot of referrals. No time without staff!

Please note: the following is based on simply making the film and not distribution or further deal making. That’s a deep mud-clinging swamp of difficulty, however important it is to get your work seen, but that subject is too complex and ever-changing to make any sense of in this particular article. Consider this piece a simple nudge forward.





Pre-Production

Writer:

As much as this role is looked down upon in studio filmmaking, everything starts on the page. Even if you plan an improvised effort, there still must exist some structure for your project. This is the area you can spend most time without any perceptible outlay. It's you and the page. Writing a screenplay in the acceptable format will also stand you in good stead. It never hurts to be professional. You could shell out for *Final Draft* which does all the formatting for you or you could spend a few hours in MS Word creating styles for the correct formatting.* Don't think about the technical details until you have something on the page you love and can defend. Oh, and write within the limits of what you hope you can achieve. If your screenplay includes a pivotal scene involving a camel, rethink the camel. And the golden rule? Please *yourself*...

* 12-point Courier font size, 1.5 inch margin on the left of the page, 1 inch margin on the right of the page, 1 inch on the top and bottom of the page, each page should have approximately 55 lines, the dialogue block starts 2.5 inches from the left side of the page, character names must have uppercase letters and be positioned starting 3.7 inches from the left side of the page. Page numbers are positioned in the top right corner with a 0.5 inch margin from the top of the page, the first page shall not be numbered, and each number is followed by a full stop. Got it? Good.

Producer:

You don't read the script. You *absorb* the script. Where are you going to get that camel from on page 3? I suggest a rewrite. It's the producer's job (probably you again) to make the film physically possible. You have to breakdown the script indicating what scenes are day or night, interiors or exteriors, whether sets are a necessity (expensive!) or whether real locations will do the trick. You have to secure the props and the costumes if it's a period piece. If it's a no-budget period piece, rewrite! And the lighting rigs and camera kit have to be hired as per the director's and the cameraperson's specs and needs. Depending on the level of production, you may want to rethink the iPhone as the 'A' camera. Shots shot on lenses on real cameras evoke emotional responses. And always think of the future. 4K is fine today but tomorrow? Consider 8K though the hardware costs of storage, backing up and archiving may be too much for your meagre budget. There's always a way to scavenge kit. Find it.

You also need to find vitally important technicians to work well for expenses or a meagre fee. Finding a DoP/operator is a given but on a no-to-low budget shoot, you simply cannot do without a sound recordist nor can you function well with actors without a make-up artist. Traditionally make-up artists get to the actors first every day and become confidantes allowing the cast to blow off steam that would only have to come out during the shoot. Make-up artists are shoot smoothers. Do not go anywhere without one. I would also consider a keen and hungry do-it-all runner/assistant who would learn on several jobs assisting everyone. The small things that come up stick like glue if you're open to learning. For example, if you're moving the camera, lens capless, outside the protection of its Peli case, make sure the lens end is facing behind you. A stray stone you kick up can therefore bounce harmlessly off its body and not scratch the filter or (if your luck is in the toilet) the lens itself. That's the sort of accident that stops no-budget shoots dead.



Mickey Rourke in **Body Heat** speaks for all producers as he talks to his once lawyer who's thinking of committing arson...

"I want you to see if this sounds familiar: any time you try a decent crime, you got fifty ways you're gonna fuck up. If you think of twenty-five of them, then you're a genius... and you ain't no genius."

As a producer, you will inevitably miss things. It's only by finding several tooth combs and taking several passes over the script, will you buy yourself any credibility and give your film a

chance to live. You also have the unenviable task of planning the shoot without a line producer who usually gets the production board (now software) organised. Getting permission in writing to shoot in certain areas is an absolute must. Make no assumptions that everywhere is your own controllable film set. You will be disabused. Expensively. And of course, never forget health and safety regulations and suitable insurance for the whole shoot.

Director:

You again, I surmise. It's your job to interpret the screenplay in the most emotional, exciting and dynamic way. As a director, it's up to you how the film is shot, from where, what kind of lens, moving camera or rock solid. You are also directly responsible for the actors' performances. Your über-persuasive, Svengali-like character will tempt your cast to give your project their all. You are the shepherd of the film and if you're also the editor, be prepared for some harsh words from that alter ego, berating you for things you didn't do. You have no budget for second unit or reshoots... If you have no budget, you cannot expect people working for only expenses to overwork silly hours. You will earn some goodwill from your cast and crew if you schedule sensitively making sure everyone has had enough time to be with their families and sleep the requisite 8 hours. Early mornings are a given but don't crack the whip much past 6 pm.

I would also heartily recommend a director and cast read through well before day one of production. In place of rehearsals, this can be a godsend. Suddenly finding out that your lead actor stresses the wrong syllable in 'Libertarian' gives you some time to talk them out of it. Actors are human beings (this goes without saying I hope) so they will bring some of their own experiences to their role. Use them. If they see a plot hole you could fly a 747 through, listen to them (and then rewrite).

All set? Good. Then, let's shoot...

Production

The following have all been true for every shoot I've ever directed...

1. If you think it will take 'x' time to shoot a scene taking into consideration possible weather problems, aircraft noise, foreseen and unforeseen problems (!), *then double or triple the time you believe it would take*. If you come in under time, you are so well prepped, you can shoot more coverage. Or you can let everyone go home earlier than normal.





2. Encourage cast and crew to wear many layers on location. Layers can always be taken off. Nonexistent layers cannot be put back on.
3. Fix it in production, not post. If you are planning to use CGI to enhance some shots or repair or erase unwanted items (with no money), work hard to obviate the need for CGI unless you or your best friend is a CG whizz already expense-budgeted into post.

Call Sheets or no Call Sheets? Despite the modest crew and size of production, stay as professional as you can. Your Call Sheets can be minimal, after all you are all living in each other's pockets presumably driving around in a single vehicle or two. Paper or digital is up to you and the crew. But basic information about the day's work should be formalised by being written down somewhere and a Call Sheet is as good a place as any. If you are blessed with actors who learn their lines before shooting, this is a godsend. No sides required (portions of the script to be shot that day). Actors who need to know what scene they are shooting only the night before are either incredibly fast line learners or not as prepared as they should be. Yes, slack needs to be cut if you're not paying anyone but if the actors are not firing, your movie will go way over schedule and moral will plummet.

Why early starts? Sunlight. Why Hollywood, California? Same reason. Early film stocks needed huge amounts of light so you went where the sun shone most. You get used to the early mornings. It's night shoots that usually do crews in. If you need to shoot night scenes, err on the interior and just black out the windows... Just trying to save a few headaches. I'm not suggesting compromises from the get-go but be aware you will compromise about fifty times a day in production of a no-to-low budget film. That's part of its charm.

The Director is the de facto boss on a shoot and it's the crew's job (even unpaid ones) to do what they want unless it's dangerous. I'm risking a gross generalisation here but I think most directors are decent enablers who can support both cast and crew with sensitivity and recognise practical handicaps that can be overcome by opening up the floor to ideas from their crew. The cliché of direction is that it doesn't matter who's responsible for what, the director will get the credit and the blame.

There's not much more to say about the shoot itself because all the problems you will encounter will be bespoke and dependent on your locations and the ability of your cast and crew. As a director, be nice. That goes a long way.

Post-Production

You have no deadline. Choose a realistic one and stick to it. Creativity unbound wanders all over the place and does little to encourage discipline. If you have a day job and you have very little time to edit etc. then reflect this in your made up deadline. As the editor/director, you should have a very good idea how the shots are supposed to cut together. But by expense-hiring another brain to cut your film, you are in effect giving your film more opportunities to be better. Perhaps on your no-to-low budget, this is unfeasible but do consider it in future.

Editors (who are not you) will see your material in vastly different ways. They won't care so much about the same things. In fact while they are there to serve your vision of the film, their vision may be better if you give them free reign. You can always insist on a director's cut so you're not losing anything. So who do you absolutely need in post?

Writer:

They left the project months ago so who needs them anymore? If 'they' are 'you' then reconsider. The easiest fixes in post are extra ADR lines. Got a plot point that didn't land? Have someone underline it off camera. While it's unheard of for a writer with no other role on a movie to make it all the way to post, the idea does tickle me given that no one would be employed if it weren't for their initial work.

Editor

D'uh.

Grader

You again? All editors can do broad grading but colourists are now regarded as much more creative souls than they used to be. Consider finding someone who knows their choice of software inside out.

CGI Technician

(See Production, point No. 3 above). Most editors know how to use mattes and masks and some NLEs now have tracking software as standard so there's a lot an editor can do, visual effects wise if they are willing to learn. But you can't beat having a specialist (only if you need them) on board who knows how to add that city in the background or remove that annoying bright green crisp packet from the edge of frame.

Sound Editor

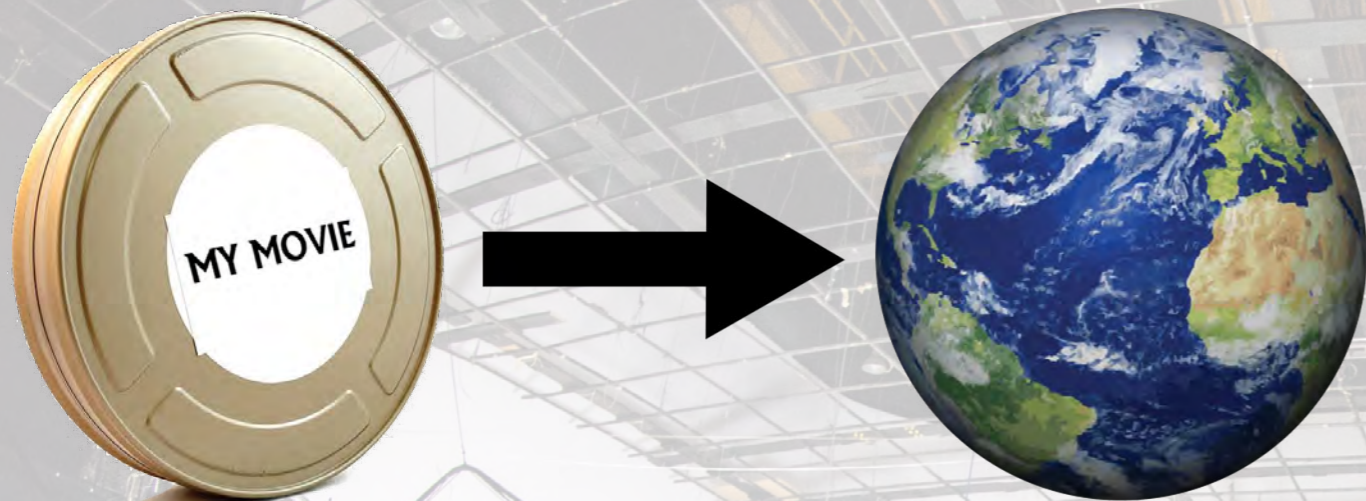
Now you may well think you can do it yourself but nothing energises post-production like having new voices and new minds adding to what's there already. Yes, you have gob-loads of free sound effects and other not so free you may find randomly spread on to your hard drives but ownership does not equate to expertise. You need a hungry sound editor who wants to cut their teeth on as many films as they can just to get experience. Find one.

Sound Mixer

I've bleated on about this often enough but sound makes pictures. On any movie post-1927, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of sound. Unless your friend owns a sound studio, this may be a legitimate and necessary cost so factor it in. You cannot produce a professional stereo or 5.1 or 7.1 soundtrack without the kit and the expertise a sound mixer brings to the (mixing) table.



Even on a no-to-low budget film, there is simply no getting around this unless you are making your film for your relatives and friends and don't care about its distribution potential. Oh, young and hungry production mixers rarely have the kit. You may have to (shock) hire an older, more experienced mixer to ensure deliverable box-ticking.



So:

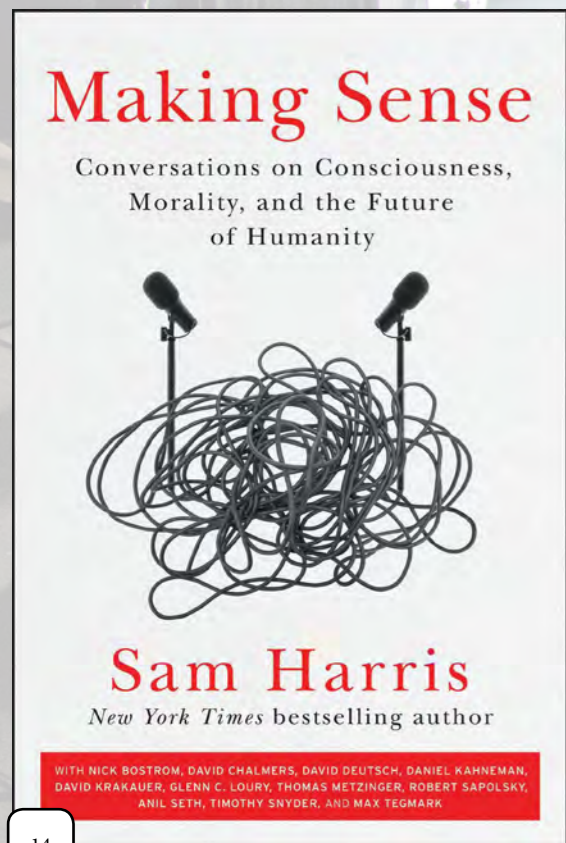
1. You have your graded finished cut.
2. You have your sound mix
3. You have your film

You are a filmmaker. Yay for you! Now comes the really hard part for which I have no helpful information. My own film, which picked up a 'Best Film with No Budget' award, was picked up by a digital distribution company in the UK and after almost a year I was told that filmmakers, who had also won awards for their work but had no distribution in place, were extremely wary of letting someone handle the distribution of their films. The filmmaker was not liable for any money but the distribution company quite reasonably wanted a slice by doing the work making the films available to the public. Apathy and indifference closed the distribution company down.

You should get a poster designed and a trailer cut and post-produced, both shown off on a website devoted only to the film. This shop front may come in handy as an overly ambitious CV entry but it will also serve as closure on the project and as you probably know, nothing is more draining of energy than a squatter on the 'To Do' list. There is nothing else you can do about your movie unless you find a distributor or the costs to distribute it yourself. On that subject I have one more utterly glorious story to tell.

Postscript:

Author and neuroscientist Sam Harris hosts a successful podcast called *Making Sense*. I have been a subscriber for many years now. He interviews every kind of public figure in sometimes very long conversations ranging widely over all aspects of culture, art and politics. He came to prominence as a 'New Atheist' after publishing *The End of Faith* in 2004, a kick back against bad ideas. He has never been afraid of putting his head well above the parapet, often talking about things that have inexplicably become taboo in today's current culture. Some of his podcasts are, in the words of American linguist and author John McWhorter, "spun gold"...



In October last year, he interviewed Meg Smaker who had made a well-reviewed film called *Jihad Rehab* which got accepted into the best festivals including the Sundance Film Festival, the Holy Grail for any first time feature documentarian. The film follows selected ex-Guantanamo inmates, who had never been formally charged by the US government, and follows their potential rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia. It played for a week over Christmas in London with the filmmaker in attendance and I have to say after seeing it, I do not understand what everyone is being so sensitive about. The question it asks is a difficult one. Do we give people, guilty of terrorism, a second chance? Harris and Smaker's three hour interview was a revelation. Here was a young American ex-firefighter who travelled to the Middle East to gain a greater understanding of what was happening in the world after 9/11. Her stories chill the blood but also lift the heart.

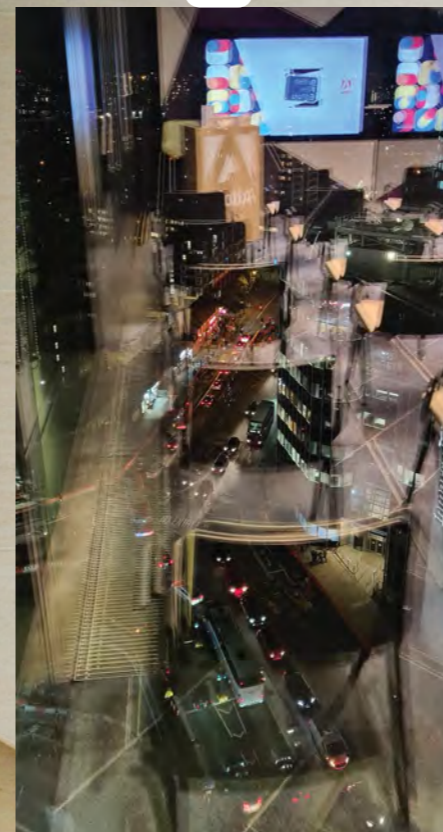
She was front page news in the US at the time because her film was suddenly withdrawn (as was as a significant filmmaking award) because of pressure from, at first, Middle Eastern filmmakers who took issue with some aspects of her film without having seen it (uh... what?) and questioned her validity as a white American woman making a film about reforming terrorists. For a measured article on the furore, please Google "Lorraine Ali Jihad." Many critics too admitted not having seen the film but called for its cancellation nonetheless. It's a tricky subject I grant you and reading less hysterical articles on the argument for cancellation, I'm not about to weigh in myself. But there seems to be no real justification for cancellation if you believe that the film was a humanist story about badly treated ex-suspected terrorists, and an opportunity for them to tell their truth. It's a tough subject but destroying someone's life by destroying their career over a matter that may not even be pertinent to the film being discussed was too much for some. The groundswell of support was ignited by Sam Harris' three hour podcast with filmmaker Meg Smaker.

Her GoFundMe campaign to get a poster designed, a trailer made and some funds for a modest distribution put a far off but hopeful target of \$200,000. Before the podcast aired, it stood at \$3,000. Six days after the podcast aired, the figure stood at...

\$498,503

...and it was still climbing as more people responded to the podcast. Today in March 2023 it's levelled out at **\$763,366**. Needless to say, Meg is distributing the film herself globally. It's such an inspiring story. This is the Sam Harris effect in action and it's truly extraordinary. I hope she gets her film distributed and a streaming service picks it up. Cinema can do a great deal to increase understanding of a sensitive situation and present nuance where fevered hyperbole and sound bites rule the roost.

Good luck with your own distribution.

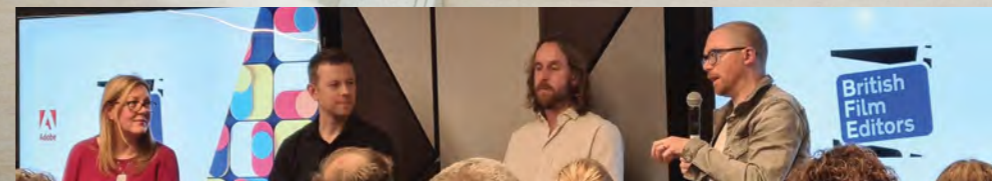


ADOBE MENTORING EVENT

by the
BFE Mentoring Team

The first BFE Mentoring Event took place at Adobe's Shoreditch office in November and was a huge success with every seat filled. Revis Meeks, Fredrik Limi, Inigo Manby and Olly Stothert took part in the Q&A and all gave interesting and varied accounts of their mentoring experiences.

It was extremely interesting to hear from our members, how they have benefited from taking part in the mentoring scheme and everyone in attendance had a chance to chat over drinks afterwards. We would like to thank Niels Stevens and Adobe for being such generous hosts and allowing us to use their fantastic venue. And thanks also to Bonnie Poole for organising and fronting the event.



CELEBRATION OF THE CUT

The Untouchables (1987)

by Alan Miller

In the distant past, 36 years ago in 1987, one of the original 70s 'movie brats' took on a big budget period crime thriller. Not to be confused with the superb 2011 French film **Intouchables**, which is also hugely entertaining but a very different story, **The Untouchables** had almost everything; a rousing screenplay by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright David Mamet; a leading man about to become an A-List star, Kevin Costner; a genuine movie legend in an Oscar winning supporting role, Sean Connery; a bad guy played by the best actor of his generation, Robert De Niro; a director at the height of his powers, Brian De Palma; a score by one of the best composers in the world, Ennio Morricone; and a thrilling narrative loosely based on a part of American history previously only presented in the 1959 TV series of the same name and a story practically unreported at the time of its actual occurrence. The one thing it didn't have was a full size steam train around which the great climactic shoot out was to be (ahem) shot.



Based on the information we had at the time (a rudimentary internet was still years away), magazines reported that originally, the 'A-list' mob leader, Alphonse Capone, was to be played by a man born for the part, the great Bob Hoskins. He demonstrated a perfectly good American accent in **Who Framed Roger Rabbit?** albeit a year after **The Untouchables** and as for convincingly portraying a seething knot of threat and potential violence, Hoskins could do that in his sleep. So why no Hoskins (who was paid nonetheless, and there's nothing like a fat pay check to deaden the sting of rejection)? Hoskins reputedly called up De Palma and asked him if there were any other films he'd like him not to appear in...

When Robert De Niro was cast, there was an apparent disparity in how much to pay top dollar De Niro against how much Hoskins was offered (and already paid) but add up all those extra costs and the expensive steam train was now an outlay that had to be shaved. Thank the Lord. God knows what brilliant and unique spin director De Palma would have put on the train shoot out but what he did instead was create one of two cinematic sequences that have made my palms sweat even the second time I saw them on the big screen (the other sequence was the climactic reveal - or not - of what was "...in the box!" at the end of **Se7en**).



And to direct this sequence he drew on film history and one of the most celebrated films and sequences of all cinema. Brian De Palma has never been shy homaging his hero Alfred Hitchcock but for the station sequence in **The Untouchables**, he outdid himself. 98 years ago, Russian director and cinematic pioneer, Sergei Eisenstein, directed (and edited) **Battleship Potemkin** (1925) which featured the oft imitated, never bettered **Odessa Steps** scene. With this startling and breathtaking sequence, Eisenstein almost singlehandedly originated 'montage', the dynamic editing style that relied on no explanation or title cards for its great power. It was editing as pure a storytelling style than any cineaste could wish for. I have to mention that predating him in this artistic revolution by a good decade was an American, David Wark Griffith, whose masterpiece cannot quite be enjoyed the same way today as **Potemkin** can. But like it or not (and trust me, you won't), **Birth of a Nation** (1915) also gave birth to editorial tropes and devices we still use today. While his cinematic genius was rightly hailed, let's say his attitudes may be somewhat problematic today by an order of the greatest magnitude. As the director's Wikipedia page has it...



In 1953 the Directors Guild of America (DGA) instituted the D. W. Griffith Award, its highest honor. However, on December 15, 1999, then DGA President Jack Shea and the DGA National Board announced that the award would be renamed as the "DGA Lifetime Achievement Award". They stated that, although Griffith was extremely talented, they felt his film **The Birth of a Nation** had "helped foster intolerable racial stereotypes", and that it was thus better not to have the top award in his name.



The Untouchables was co-edited by acclaimed editor Jerry Greenberg who tutored under the legendary Dede Allen. The latter gave the former great credit for editing the climactic shooting of the outlaws in **Bonnie and Clyde**. His car chase sequence in **The French Connection** has been called "the finest example of montage editing since **Battleship Potemkin** (1925)". That's quite the accolade as well as a nice bow to tie a ribbon on his experience cutting **The Untouchables'** train station sequence.

Greenberg's co-editor Bill Pankow teamed up with director Brian De Palma from 1980's **Dressed To Kill** as associate editor working again with Jerry Greenberg. It says a lot about their relationship that they were still comfortable working together seven years on. Pankow was primary editor on nine subsequent De Palma films and cut one of my cult favourites, **Parents**, directed by Bob Balaban, 1989.

So let's check out the sequence.



The key to putting behind bars the biggest mob boss in the 1920s and early 30s in prohibition era North America is in getting Al Capone's bookkeeper to turn State's evidence or in the slang parlance of the time, to squeal.

The Treasury police officer in charge of bringing down Capone, Eliot Ness (unbriable, hence an 'untouchable' of the title) waits for the bookkeeper to be escorted to Chicago's Union Station to take a train where he'll intercept him and take him into custody. He knows he's up against it with only one man to help him (Andy Garcia as gun protégé and hothead George Stone) and that the bookkeeper will be strongly protected.

As Ness waits at the top of a long staircase, a mother with her child in a pram is negotiating the descent with suitcases to deal with as well as her child. Minutes go by as Ness sees the woman struggle, one step at a time. His 'gentlemanly' instincts eventually overwhelm him and he moves to help her thereby putting him in a much more vulnerable position. A man with a heavily bandaged nose appears and seems to recognise Ness, the man who broke it...

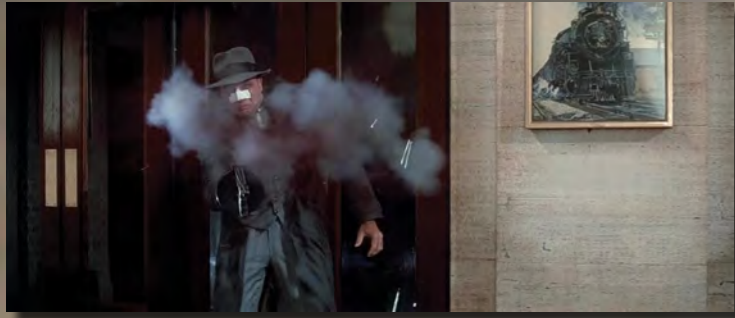
So how does the hero deal with (1) the broken nosed man, (2) the mother with an out of control pram careering down the steps, (3) armed hoodlums shooting at all and sundry, (4) protecting his material witness, the bookkeeper and (5) paying homage to one of the greatest edited sequence in film history?

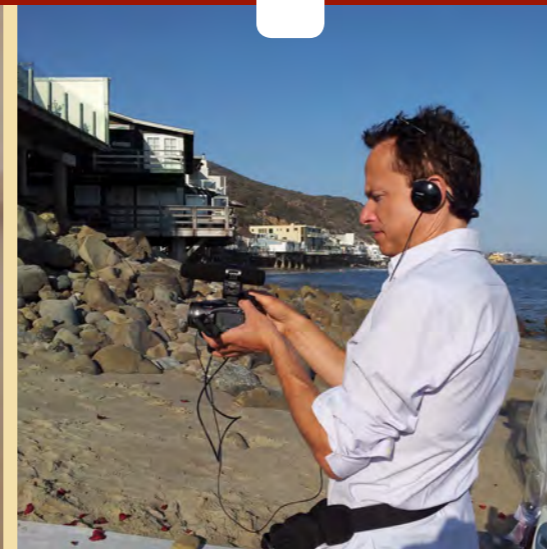


Like this... (the homage frames are in black and white...)



Read each column from top to bottom:





ROGER NYGARD

An Exclusive Extract From His Next Book

After completing *Cut to the Monkey*, I turned my attention to writing about making documentaries. I begin by asking the most obvious question, What is a documentary? My answer is: A documentary is a story captured with a camera about real people and events.

When I was editing my first documentary *Trekkies* (1997), I discovered that the film's strength - its downright belly laughs - might also be its weakness. At a test screening, it was difficult for viewers to quickly navigate between funny segments and serious moments. After screening new footage for Denise Crosby, one of my partners in the project, she said she was afraid she wouldn't be able to stop laughing after watching *Star Trek* fan Rich Kronfeld driving his Captain Pike chair down a snowy Minneapolis sidewalk. I had placed this scene near the front of the film with other fan introductions, but it was almost impossible to get somber enough afterward for the James Doohan suicide-letter story. I had to move the chair chapter as far toward the end of the film as possible because nothing could follow it. And that wasn't the only controversy surrounding this segment.

Audiences sometimes have the perception that everything in documentaries is real. While we were making *Trekkies*, Rich Kronfeld was also filming Minneapolis-based comedy sketches, featuring a twitchy, sweaty character named Dr. Sphincter. *Trekkies* executive Producer Michael Leahy was afraid people would recognize Kronfeld as a comedic performer. He took me aside in the editing room and asked, "Come on, you can tell me, the Pike chair guy is a gag, isn't it?"

I replied, "That guy owns that chair. And his Enterprise telephone. I swear, he owns all that stuff."

Leahy wasn't convinced. "Come on. That hair is a gag. The crumpled-up drawings. It has to be."

My primary goal was to make the most entertaining film possible. But does everything in a documentary have to be one hundred per cent true? How real does reality have to be? How much can you re-enact or fake something? As Michael Leahy and I debated the boundaries, I argued that everything in a documentary is staged to some degree. Most of our film is a "managed reality." I cited examples: David Greenstein doesn't go shopping in his *Star Trek* uniform every day, but he did it for our cameras. When we found out that co-workers call Barbara Adams "Commander," we set up a situation so we could capture it on camera.



Gabriel Koerner waited for our cameras to arrive before he picked up his new *Star Trek* uniform so we could film his reaction.

A few days later, Michael Leahy called to read a dictionary definition of the word "documentary" to me: "...a film, TV program, etc. that dramatically shows or analyzes news events, social conditions, etc., with little or no fictionalization." He was greatly relieved to see that a "little" fictionalization is allowed.ⁱ

When I asked Denise Crosby what she thought about the Rich Kronfeld segment, she said, "Of course documentaries manipulate. It's the nature of the form. In *Brother's Keeper* (1992) they controlled all the aspects of their interviews; they took them back to the locations of the original events and asked them questions."

Rich Kronfeld is a funny performer, but he is also a bona fide *Star Trek* fan. I felt we were justified in keeping his segment in the documentary. But I predicted other documentarians will finger us immediately. Documentarians set up scenes for maximum effect. Nature films, such as *Microcosmos* (1996), stage their insects for best possible angles and lighting. Hidden camera shows such as *Candid Camera* (1948 - 2014) [as well as the modern versions *Punk'd* (2003 - TBD), *Impractical Jokers* (2011 - TBD), or *Who is America?* (2018)] can be argued are the only true documentary style, when subjects have no idea they are on camera.

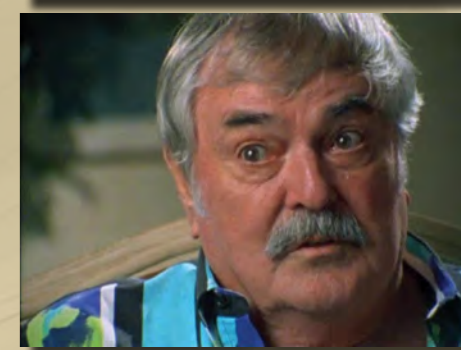
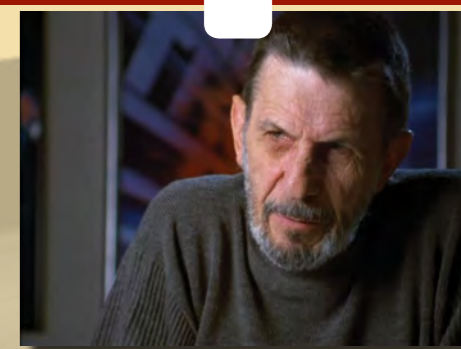
A natural aspect of documentary filmmaking is that people change their behavior when they know they are being watched. Sociologists call it the Hawthorne Effect, or the observer effect.ⁱⁱ It turns out this effect appears to occur even in physics. The way a particle is being observed can alter its behavior. The mere act of observation affects experimental findings.ⁱⁱⁱ Humans put on the model-citizen act when we know we are being watched. Sometimes it's a problem to be managed. Other times, an interviewee is chosen precisely because they amp up the charisma when the camera is turned on. When we filmed the *Star Trek* theme bands Warp 11, No Kill I, and a Klingon death-metal band called Stovokor in *Trekkies 2* (2004), they emphasized their fandom in such an extreme fashion I don't think they could possibly play up *Star Trek* geekdom more. The lesson for documentarians is to be aware of the observer effect, and to edit in such a way that truth is amplified, not diminished.

(i) Collins English Dictionary. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/documentary>

(ii) Bloombaum, M. (1983). The Hawthorne experiments. A critique and reanalysis of the first statistical interpretation by Franke and Kaul. *Sociological Perspectives*. January, 26(1), 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389160>

(iii) Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, London, England: Prometheus Books (1958), p. 137

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FOBBED OFF

THE UNOFFICIAL SECRETS PACT

by

Phil B. McLean

NO DISCUSSING ANYTHING

How did it all start? An editor friend once said to me, "Once the photocopier was invented, there were no more secrets..." Getting the law to force people to keep secrets was always an arrangement that didn't as much skate on thin ice than employ heated blades with which to do so. It was a law, on the face of it, born to discourage idea-stealing, a genuinely legitimate business concern. It was, under its mask, a fairly hopeless wish that human beings would not act like human beings. A very famous author, set to publish anonymously on the strength of her new book in a new genre, was outed mere weeks before publication of her debut in crime fiction, *The Cuckoo's Calling*. Gruff Scotsman Robert Galbraith was revealed as Harry Potter scribe J. K. Rowling. But can anyone be surprised at this revelation? Galbraith, despite 'his' talent as a writer, was not going to set the cash tills rattling the way the boy wizard author was. I'm surprised the secret didn't come out earlier though you could say it was perfect timing to propel the book to the top of the charts. If the resource abundant souls among us cannot get secrets to stay secrets then what hope is there for the rest of us?

Forcing people to keep secrets is like asking cats to stop behaving like entitled house owners. It's just not in their nature. But maritime law in the 1940s required such enforcement and big, emerging companies such as IBM were quick in setting out their NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement) stall but then as the digital world came knocking, secrets revealed would make or break companies. Things seemed to quietly tick along until the 70s when NDAs were employed not just to keep secrets but to actually deny the actions of selected people involved in sensitive enquiries. Under the blanket of 'national security' (the catch-all for "Sit down and shut up," and a modern substitute for "No comment,"), these contracts forbade consultants

to "indicate, divulge or acknowledge" that they even worked on an investigation while it was ongoing. This was the case in the House Select Committee set up to investigate the Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations. Of course, arguably the most successful enforcers of an NDA operated well outside the law. They didn't call it a Non-Disclosure Agreement. They called it 'Omerta', the 'code of silence'. There were harsh penalties for whistle blowers, notably being condemned to 'sleep with the fishes'... Mafia slang was always very evocative.

In the 1980s, NDAs proliferated like wildfire. The freedom of the Press became a somewhat ironic catchphrase while dogged investigative journalists tried to find other ways towards the truth. The first real 'star' of the whistle blowers was Jeffrey Wigand (played by Russell Crowe in Michael Mann's *The Insider*, 1999). He could not keep silent about the evident health risks of smoking (a *legal* breaking of the NDA) but was mercilessly hounded and pilloried by his employers during the furore surrounding his actions.

NEVER DEFAME ANYONE

Especially if they are powerful monsters... Many people, in fear for their jobs, will turn, if certainly not a cheek, then a blind eye to crimes ranging from the petty to the sexually violent. Public interest in the legal way of protecting people behaving monstrously, prurient or not, seemed to have peaked with the very public downfall of Harvey Weinstein. He took so many legal and illegal efforts to protect himself from prosecution that edited well, they would make a very grim TV series. *Succession* would have a run for its money in the least appealing character stakes. Justice seemed to have been prised out from the rock it was hiding under and all power to those who risked more than their jobs to bring this man to account.

Soon NDAs were known more for protecting serious lawbreaking than keeping legitimate secrets. You could say that the NDA has a digital twin in the VPN, a Virtual Private Network, a piece of software that frustrates any party trying to track your movements and action on the internet. But when the law is brought to bear in concealing the sexual abuse of children in the

Catholic Church, the health dangers of certain breast implants or the environmental damage caused by big businesses, then that law is an ass and the public needs to be better served.

So what's all this got to do with editing? The fact that most of us now know what NDA stands for should tell us something. I started working at a post-house and was dismayed that you could go nowhere without a fob, that little plastic half-finger that doubled as a key ring. I was also a little put out that it took a week to get hold of another security need, the lanyard that enabled you to use the lift. Yes, you could wait for a kind soul to travel upwards with but if they worked on the 3rd floor and you were on the 14th, then up the stairs you go (with Fob will travel). OK, a \$200 million movie has some claim to the right to protect its 'secrets' and, as in the case of a Wolverine movie turning up online before it was actually finished was a breach that should result in fines and a firing at the very least. Fair enough. But can we draw a line at broadcast TV? Who is going to wander into a cutting room, take a photo of 'Celeb 01' appearing in a regular TV show not to be aired for a month or so and sell it to the tabloids as an exclusive? I may be being naïve here as I don't read the tabloids and rarely watch broadcast TV.

NORMALLY DAMNED ANTISOCIAL

Locking all the cutting rooms cuts off at the source any social interaction, once the lifeblood of any editing community. It got so bad that I almost cheered every time the cleaners knocked on the door. Yes, you need some privacy to work but you also need comradeship and social interplay to exchange ideas, to be interested in others and, damn it, to be human. To this end, I wrote the following which I stuck up on the communal kitchen cabinet door:

To My Fellow Post House Filmmakers on this Floor

Hullo,

I've been editing long hours (haven't we all?) in my cutting room for 10 days now and have said hullo to so few of you in the kitchen area, I thought before

I leave for home tomorrow morning, I would offer a 5-10 minute social break at noon when we could all assemble in the kitchen area, identify ourselves and the projects we are working on just to make a connection. I'm asking for just a few scant minutes out of your day...

Working from home has its advantages but when I started in this industry in the early 16th century, doors were always open and sociability a must to keep the wheels turning. It doesn't help that we are all literally locked away (a necessary Covid precaution perhaps) but for a few moments today, it would be nice to acknowledge we are a community and not chained to our Avids however much we love the job.

I just want to leave the city knowing a little of what was going on around me rather than answer the question at home "Did you have a good time?" with "I loved working on a great film with a great producer, but saw and interacted with practically no one else."

Go on. Take a chance. See you at noon?

It was a heartfelt cry into the abyss of modern post-production. I got two responses, one at the appointed hour and another popped in later in the day to say that he appreciated my efforts. Ah well. We keep trying even while we keep secrets. You keep trying too.



SAVE OUR SQUAD



HE'S COMING HOME

Editing *Save Our Squad* with David Beckham

by Radek Sienski



A few months ago I was approached by Richard Mears and Exec Jon Crisp to lend my hand at editing their new show for Disney+ featuring David Beckham. I had worked with Jon in the past on *First Dates* and numerous times with Rich, on documentaries such as *Ronnie O'Sullivan's American Hustle* and BAFTA-nominated *The Write Offs*. I knew we were a good fit as we developed a shorthand in the edit and share a similar set of sensibilities, but I made them aware from the get-go that I'm not a football expert. Thankfully, my expertise in storytelling prevailed as Rich wanted to get me on board to iron out some narratives and to make the show 'more cinematic'.

The show follows arguably the most famous footballer in the world, who returns to his roots in East London to mentor a team in the Echo League (13-14 year olds) struggling in the new league and potentially facing relegation. Beckham treated the teenage players with warmth and humour, developing a bond, yet serving as an authoritative figure who could push them to achieve greatness. The team already had a wonderful coach Ade and his assistant Edwin, but it was Beckham who gave them a confidence boost.

Initially, the producers asked me to edit the finale of the series to which I agreed wholeheartedly. The show was conceived as 6x30" episodes, but a few weeks into my edit, the powers that be decided to make it 4x45" episodes instead. Consequently, I worked across the whole series, contributing to episodes 2 and 3, rejigging the narratives to fit the new format and editing episode 4 from scratch. We had edit producers for each of the four episodes, but for the first few weeks I worked alone to help to shape episodes 2 and 3. The style of the show, its musical identity and how the games were edited wasn't fully formed so it was enjoyable to try and see what worked in elevating the quality of the matches whilst maintaining a strong narrative thread throughout.



I tried to use my non-football eye to make sure that the show could provide inspiration to viewers of any background, even those not associated with the footie.

The most challenging part was portraying teenagers aged 13-14 in a way that would engage with a variety of viewers to empathise with them and see the world through their eyes. We wanted to avoid the viewers perceiving them as 'difficult'. I made a call to embrace each of their 'teenage moments', the stubbornness, lack of focus, etc. That enabled us to explore these story lines and with the involvement of David Beckham it made for compelling narratives. For example, Beckham explores why Ethan is disruptive to the whole team in episode 2, but instead of trying to force him to change, he motivates the youngster to channel that energy toward focusing on the game. By embracing these types of story lines we got more heart out of the show.

After a while you realise how much of the players' success actually starts in their minds before they even hit the pitch. Once I began putting the episodes together, I could see how the mental state of the players was affecting their game. For example, Rio, who is a brilliant striker, struggled with confidence and during the initial matches didn't perform well, which had a direct impact on how the whole team played. Once Beckham took him under his wing and spent some time with him at a boxing gym, his newly found confidence was almost palpable and Rio was a different person on the pitch!

I also had a unique opportunity to edit content designed to influence and evoke an emotional response in our teenage players. It was a highlights reel of the past games which was then played to the team on big screens at Wembley Stadium. It felt like a two-fold way of editing the scene; I got to affect the boys directly



with the video which in turn made the actual scene in the show. I put a lot of heart into the 2 minute video to demonstrate their progress from tough beginnings to recent successes. I made sure to feature each and every one of them. It was my chance to squeeze some emotion out of otherwise fairly self-conscious teenagers. My plan worked and the boys became visibly moved and excited, coach Ade shed a tear and you could see how proud Beckham was of them! It was a joy to edit the final sequence and it became the first scene of the final episode.

In the last 8 weeks I was joined by Tom Locking, a very experienced edit and series producer whom I had the pleasure of first working with on *First Dates* a few years ago. Tom and I jumped at the difficult task of crafting a satisfying and exciting final episode. The challenge was not only to wrap up all the narratives with the individual boys, but also give a sense of the milestone they achieved as a team. Getting the structure right was crucial before we could fully flesh out emotional scenes.



I strongly argued we should open with a sequence where the boys visit Wembley stadium with Beckham. Initially, the producers were against it because we saw the players in St. George's Park, the official training ground of the English national team at the end of the previous episode, and they were hesitant to make this sequence feel similar. My argument was that the final episode needs to have a grand opening and that sequence really felt like it re-fuelled their ambition to do their absolute best for the end of the season. I had to be diplomatic about it and did prepare other versions to compare, but it became evident that was the way to go and that's how the episode starts now.



Another memorable scene was when the producers suggested we edit the final training scene like a **Rocky** training montage. After watching the rushes, it struck me that it could be more than that. Beckham joined the boys halfway to see the progress they had made and the connection he had with every single one of them was palpable. I suggested proceeding with the strength of the material as I managed to find plenty of warm moments between Beckham and the kids; he had shown a lot of interest in their personal lives which nicely played as a culmination of their relationship. To put a cherry on top he joined the training, kicking and passing the ball with all of them. It was a truly beautiful moment and made for a much better scene.



The most rewarding part of this project was the motivational aspect of it. I loved telling the story of these ordinary yet very gifted boys through the eyes of David Beckham. I could see how much potential they had and how the show could both entertain and inspire.



I love stories about underdogs, because I was one myself, coming from Poland at the age of 20, trying to make my name in the TV industry. Even though the discipline is different, the whole ethos of diligence, persistence, patience and hard work definitely can be translated to anyone's story. Hopefully, it will inspire both teenagers and adults to chase their dreams, however unobtainable they might be. I know it worked for me.

Save Our Squad with David Beckham premiered on Disney+ on November 9th 2022, currently holding 100% critic score and 86% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes. *The Telegraph* said 'There's a reason why football underdogs make such good TV – and you can't help rooting for this likeable bunch of young players' and *The Guardian* called it 'TV as heartbreaking and uplifting as it gets'.



DEAD GIVEAWAY



There's So Much To Learn For Free
From The Very Best of The Past



by Elon Rowless
(Come on folks, that one's easy!)

Editor's Note: Mr./Ms. Rowless may be self-taught but the range of older films chosen to illustrate the value of the past may be esteemed but they are far from worldly. I invite anyone interested in opening up such a rich vein of the cinematic past by suggesting other titles produced well away from further climes than Ealing Studios and the Hollywood hills. All suggestions welcome if not actually mandatory... See my piece on page 3 for an added incentive. On that subject, thanks to Andy Kemp and Lennart van Oldenborgh - see later.

Not that long ago my neighbour's daughter was going out with a film student who wasn't very well versed in what had come much before the 90s in terms of exposure to classic films. Feeling that he might be at a disadvantage in his studies if he didn't at least know what the landmark films were regardless of age, I thought I'd give him some support. I trawled my own movie collection and systematically chose the most well-known, the most influential, the most regarded work from the year dot right up to the end of the 20th century. Am I a qualified film professor? No. Do I know film? Kind of, in the narrow English-language heavy furrow I plough. My own professors were the films themselves as well as my own passion and curiosity taking in a few mentors along the way. Film is in my blood. And if I could save this guy the embarrassment of asking "Who's Billy Wilder?" then I would take up that challenge with glee.

The phrase "standing on giants' shoulders" is applicable here. We have been standing on those sturdy foundations for so long we've probably forgotten their importance. Giants in the film and television industry, some long gone and some still here, have taught and are teaching us how to tell stories, giving us the knowledge and wisdom of their craft and to quote a certain Colonel Jessop "I would rather you say 'thank you' and went on your way." Well, we never say thank you. So that's what this short article is about, thanking the past for the seemingly effortless sophistication of the present.

All it takes is an older film which catches you by surprise and you say "That was brilliant! (a beat) What else is out there that I know nothing about?" First of all, you have to get past the black and white issue. One of the best jokes on a very silly but fondly remembered series in the 70s on the BBC, *The Goodies*, had the team taking over a studio and making 'old movies'.



Tim: (looking around the studio) "You've painted everything black and white!"

Bill: "Certainly. I'm making a black and white film."

Tim: "Don't be ridiculous!"

Bill: "This is a hard job. Cor blimey! No wonder they went over to colour!"

To some movies, black and white is a badge of honour but it is inevitably a sign of age, like wrinkles. And some people respond badly to wrinkles. So here's the first in a series of articles pushing the very best from the past from my all too limited perspective. You will no doubt recognise some of these titles and directors' names but if you've not seen these films, you really are missing out on some of the finest work by acknowledged masters of their craft.



As this is an ongoing series, I will concentrate on three filmmakers and choose the films that are most representative of their work but also still more than accessible to a modern audience. There seems to be little point in suggesting and promoting work that might bore the sprockets off our younger members but then that's my call and my call is invariably narrow and loaded with bias. So, older BFE members, help me out here. This article complements the question I put out in the newsletter many months ago...

What pre-1970 film would you advise an up and coming editor watch and why? Am trying not to abandon brilliant older movies to the streaming skip of unavailable, profitless films no matter how well regarded.

OK, so let's go.

Editor's Note: While I support the encouragement of delving into the past to sniff out truffles, I'm reminded of a moment at the close of the original **Planet of the Apes** (certainly one of my list of golden oldies). The astronaut Taylor (Charlton Heston), having landed on the titular planet has been through hell but now finds himself with a girl, a gun and a horse heading out into the unknown on this mysterious planet. He says "It still doesn't give me the why... A planet where apes evolved from men? There's got to be an answer." Wise but censorious orangutan, Dr. Zaius says "Don't look for it, Taylor... You may not like what you find..." Well, you must know, as a well-informed 21st century human being, that the past was inescapably sexist, racist, ignorant and parochial. Just mere decades ago certain beliefs were prevalent and not questioned. This warning must be stated and not overstated. While forgiveness may be off the table (we are all products of our own time and cannot change this fact), can we just accept these ingrained sins and look at the art and craft of cinema unshackled by today's hard fought for conventions? That one's up to you.



First of all a giant who straddles the black and white and colour eras who made his first movie in 1957 and his last in 2007. That's an astonishing 50 year career and while some directors just get better and better over time, Sidney Lumet started on an extraordinary high. His first film is on many favourite lists, a film that should be anything but cinematic. What's so great about a dozen sweaty American white guys, all who have somewhere else to be, in one room all arguing about whether a young man should be executed for a murder he may or may not have committed? Here's the power of **Twelve Angry Men**.



I want to see it again right now. In fact, excuse me for ninety two minutes... It still stands up beautifully. Lee J. Cobb (the benevolent detective in **The Exorcist**, Lt. Kinderman) is at his belligerent best here. It's hard to believe you are watching an actor, so thoroughly does he inhabit his character. Yes, the white knight liberal part is well played with quiet stoicism by leading man Henry Fonda, but it's Cobb who dominates the screen. Each character represents a facet of the human condition and you can understand the motives of all of them but they are presented as a microcosm of society and in turn an all too relevant and topical warning against prejudice and ignorance.

Director Billy Wilder has his fair share of classics to his name. While I could have chosen any from this impressive roster... (**Some Like It Hot**, **Double Indemnity**, **The Apartment**, **Sunset Boulevard** or **The Lost Weekend**) I chose a film that still has a great deal to say about cynicism, populism and greed, aspects of our current world that are more prevalent than ever. Again, it's dominated by superb acting, in particular Kirk Douglas as a washed-up reporter who seizes an opportunity for fame and fortune. **Ace in the Hole** (also known as **The Big Carnival** for those people who can't appreciate good wordplay) is the story of a man desperate for the world to recognise his talent.



In turn, he would land another prize job for one of the top newspapers. After a career that took in slander, adultery and alcoholism, he finds himself at the bottom of the greasy pole in the south western states having tasted a morsel of stardom and fame. Now, he'll do anything to get it back. Working for the Albuquerque Sun-Bulletin, he lasts a year on the wagon quietly filing stories for his modest editor, and just before arriving at a rattlesnake hunt, Tatum hears about the hapless Leo Minosa who's trapped underground after trying to liberate (aka steal) old artefacts. Taking control of the situation, Tatum investigates further. His commanding behaviour in this scene reminded me of Eddie Murphy in **Beverly Hills Cop** and just how far a swaggering confidence can take you. But Tatum is canny and takes just enough risks to begin a relationship with the stricken man. Poor Leo is not in a position to be choosy and he puts his faith in the one soul who only ever had one man's interests at heart.



Howard Hawks (another highly regarded Hollywood director) is also responsible for movies now regarded as classics. **His Girl Friday** (a gender-swap version of Ben Hecht's play *The Front Page*) is remarkable for a number of reasons. Dialogue-wise, it's the fastest film ever made, each actor firing off words as if from a Gatling gun. At the heart of the story is a man trying to reclaim his ex-wife. She is determined to leave the crazy world of journalism behind to marry someone else... tomorrow.



The twist is that the wife is the husband's best reporter on a newspaper he edits and the paper is covering the biggest story of the day. On the pretence of needing her journalistic skills, he tries to woo her back. Cary Grant as Walter Burns is relentless in his underhanded, calculated dishonesty at every turn. You soon understand why Rosalind Russell playing Hildy Johnson left him in the first place. The film is modern in the way so few 1940s movies could ever claim to be. The speed of the delivery together with the chemistry of the actors is enough to qualify it as a classic, but it's also subversive because the rogue gets the girl and the nice guy finishes last. Spoilers!



Ralph Bellamy as the hapless Bruce Baldwin proves to be way too straight for an ambitious go-getter like Hildy who equates what she will never be as something to covet, a classic mistake. The rogue of course is Cary Grant who might have been somewhat limited in his range but like Keano Reeves, when the role fits the actor, there's no one better. Editorially it's also remarkable in that the tempo of the cut changes throughout marking a distinct difference between the hectic, dynamic whirlwind of the newsroom and the life Hildy appears to want with dull old Bruce. The esteemed Quentin Tarantino rates **His Girl Friday** as one of his favourite movies and that's the best 'modern' recommendation I could find.

Editor's Note: While I planned this feature to be a recurring one (there is so much brilliance hidden in the vaults) I do value members' submissions with suggestions of pre-1970 movies that deserve not only a mention but re-evaluation. I'm happy to say both Andy Kemp and Lennaart van Oldenborgh have made their choices (see next page) and I am thrilled to forward anyone's opinion over my own (or indeed, Elon Rowless'). Come on BFE'ers! Channel your inner cineaste and come up with a title. You don't have to review it. You just have to tell me in a single sentence why it deserves to be let out of the vaults. You know the email address...

Pre-1970 Films Every Editor Should See



Accattone

(1961) directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, edited by Nino Baragli

Apart from the pre-1970 great classics that every editor, indeed every person, should see – like Eisenstein’s **Battleship Potemkin**, Welles’s **Citizen Kane** and Godard’s **Breathless** (yes I’m sneaking a few extra titles in here!) – I’d like to make the case for Pasolini’s first feature **Accattone**, which has long been a personal favourite of mine.

It tells the story of a low-life pimp nicknamed Accattone (‘scrounger’), who tries to survive in the slums of Rome. He appears doomed from the start, and although the camera follows him closely and obsessively, Pasolini makes no attempt to make him look sympathetic.

Although **Accattone**’s style owes a lot to neorealism, it goes beyond it in some clearly observable ways. In one remarkable scene, Accattone gets into a fight with his brother-in-law, but instead of a Hollywood-style, choreographed punch-up, we see lingering wide shots of two scruffy men rolling in the dirt, to a stirring orchestral soundtrack of J. S. Bach’s *Johannes Passion*. The pace and music feel completely incongruous to a fight scene, but express Pasolini’s preoccupation with the intersections between the sacred and the profane (he made **The Gospel According to Matthew** three years later).

Pasolini once wrote a short essay called *Observations on the Long Take*, in which he claims that the meaning of a shot, like the meaning of a life, is only fixed in retrospect. It means that as long as we linger on a long take, the viewer is forced to suspend judgment. In **Accattone**, we often linger on a shot for just a bit longer than is comfortable, especially for a contemporary audience. But I believe this gives the film a rawness that speaks to a certain ‘vulnerability of the flesh’, a profanity that stands in such marked contrast to the rousing, sacred music in the soundtrack that it forces us to suspend our judgment, and look at the scene with new eyes.

Nino Baragli’s editing on **Accattone** was initially dismissed as ‘amateurish’, but Pasolini was clearly impressed, because Baragli edited all of Pasolini’s subsequent films. He also edited some of Sergio Leone’s classic spaghetti westerns, and won high praise for the way he handled the complex chronology of **Once Upon A Time In the West**.

Lennaart van Oldenborgh, February 2023

The Wonder Ring

(1955) directed and edited by Stan Brakhage

I was heavily into experimental films made in the 60s by people like David Rimmer, Michael Snow, Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger. I was not only absorbed by the sheer poetry of their work, but I found the ‘guerrilla’ nature of their filmmaking a real inspiration. How they achieved what they did on their own and with the technology available to them motivated so many young filmmakers. I am always fascinated to hear about technical boundaries pushed by enthusiastic ‘guerrilla’ filmmakers, particularly in mainstream cinema from the wildly ambitious multilayered optical effects used in the first **Star Wars** film to hearing about how Paul Machliss lashed up his on location edit rig for the film **Baby Driver**. It is very exciting to see how story tellers continue to bend the technology to suit their needs rather than being limited by it.

I would recommend Stan Brakhage’s 1955 film **The Wonder Ring**, a 6 minute visual poem about New York’s elevated metro. Experimental film buffs would travel great distances to see such films in dingy cinemas in the middle of the night, now you can find this one and many others on YouTube.

Within hours of writing this I received a link to a film made by Adam Richardson BFE **The Dream goes On Forever** <https://youtu.be/YJl3LCjkKhW> Another piece of cinematic poetry.

Andy Kemp BFE



THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOW NOT TO PRODUCE

BY ED TORR

The idea of an encyclopedia is kind of a delicious absurdity. The notion of capturing the knowledge of absolutely everything under a single publication. It’s more a pursuit for a deranged Werner Herzog character: herculean in scope, impossible to resist, doomed to fail, destroying people along the way. How would you even get started? Personally I wouldn’t. But as luck would have it, two people, a producer and station exec. I worked with, effectively wrote a sizable percentage of this tome for me, using their careers in place of a keyboard.

So here it is, a story from the BC era (before Covid) -- Parts 1 and 2

The Encyclopedia of How NOT to Produce - Part #1

TRUTH IS DECLARABLE

I get offered a job editing two episodes of a news & public affairs series at a PBS affiliate. They’re scheduling 3 weeks per episode, flat rate per episode. I don’t do flat rates, but in this case the pay works. I’ve worked at this station before; 3 weeks for a half hour is plenty of time, and if it pushes to a 4th, the rate is still fine. We sign the contract. The topic for the first episode is the state of news and public affairs – a self-reflective look at the cutbacks, threats, challenges, and changes buffeting journalism, viewed from a local perspective. Not a fresh idea, but a substantive one I happen to care about. It turns out this season they’re changing the style of the series. Out with the news format, in with something closer to investigative documentary. Sounds intriguing. At our first meeting one of the station employees hands around some tidy, color-coded spreadsheets mapping out the schedule of a season’s worth of shows, ours included.

“We said three weeks. This only gives one week,” I note.
Spreadsheet Guy: “We’re on an extremely limited schedule.”

I’m in a room with 4 people: the producer (call her ‘Sharon’), a station executive (call him ‘Boris’), spreadsheet guy (‘Felix’), and budget woman (Brenda). The key players – the authors of this compendium – are producer Sharon & station exec Boris.

Producer Sharon used to do a prime time network news-like show that was *60 Minutes*-ish (famous US current affairs doc. - Ed.) originally but which later I think devolved into tawdry crime show. I've seen one or two episodes and never gave it much thought. She's revolved between that and public broadcasting for years. Station exec Boris is a guy I've worked around for years but never really gotten to know. I've heard and seen good things about him... and bad. I don't have an opinion either way. Budget Brenda I've worked with on and off over the years, chatted with her in the halls here and there. She's friendly and smart. Spreadsheet Felix is responsible, competent, hard-working and understated.

Station exec Boris and Producer Sharon have an exciting announcement: "The show will be cut in one week."

Ed: "Don't we go to air in October?"

Producer Sharon: "I know, it's really tight."

Ed: "It's May."

Producer Sharon: "But we have a lot of shows to get through."

Ed: "I've got 2, you've got 10 total. Your schedule shows us finishing in August."

Station exec Boris: "But we still have online, color, mix..."

Ed: "If we start online, color, and mix in August, we'll be finished... in August. That leaves September and most of October."

Budget woman Brenda: "But we still have to deliver."

Ed: "The NOC [the room that controls the station broadcast] is down the hall. They just need an export file."

Station Exec Boris: "It's not that simple."

Ed (thinking): True. Getting a clear and accurate list of broadcast specs is next to impossible, but basically you need an export file, and the people with their finger on the 'Play-this-on-the-air-in-October-at-6pm' button, work literally down the hall from us. The thing is, at some level they're doing me a favor. I'm paid a flat rate. If we get done in a week, that triples my rate.

Ed: "So you're saying the show's already scripted? How much have you shot?"

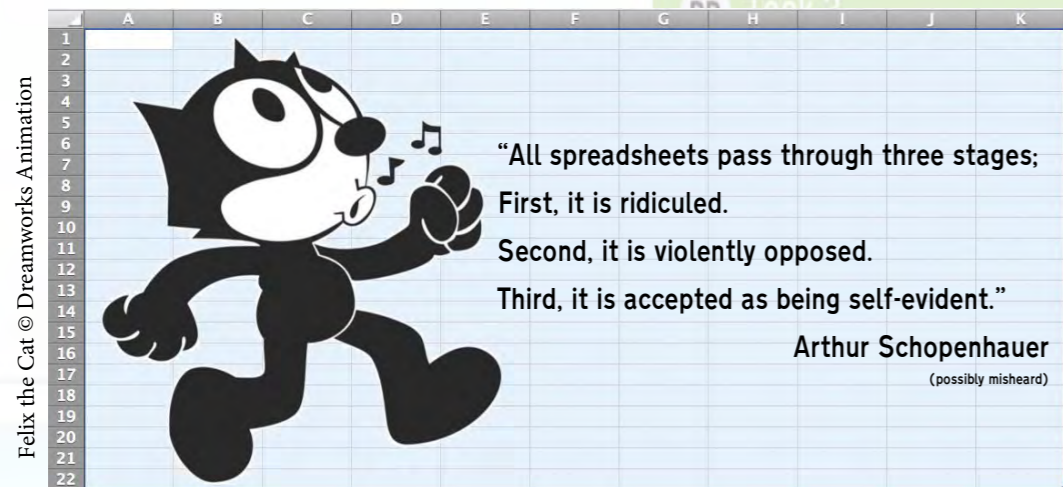
Producer Sharon: "We're lining up interviews right now."

Haven't started shooting yet? Changing the format? It's Monday. I love the idea of making triple my rate, but if this is their idea of "planning", we'll be lucky to finish in 3 months, let alone 3 weeks.

Ed: "This is going to take more than a week."

Prod/Exec/Budget woman (in chorus): "There's no – it just has to – we're on a schedule – this is what we've got to – We've just got to make it happen. There's just no other option."

(Side note: That chorus, including phrasing, pacing, partial sentences, and hyphens, I didn't write any of that. It's transcription. It's boilerplate producer patter. I can lip-sync that jingle live in real time, to the beat, spontaneously). They point at the spreadsheet, as if spreadsheets somehow get to declare the truth. IMHO, spreadsheets are barely good at what they're intended to do. The last thing they deserve is promotion. To some extent I feel for them; it is a gorgeous spreadsheet. The color coding, the alignment, those cells... If they listen to me, it'll look more like Mrs. Lowry getting a face lift in **Brazil**. Maybe we can put the schedule on the air instead of a news special: Cells A:1 to K:22.



Count: 14

The Encyclopedia of How NOT to Produce - Part #2

EDITING TAKES A WEEK

Apparently this is a meme among people who see themselves as management. "The show needs to be cut in a week". It pops up everywhere, and it's spreading. To be clear, I'm not referring to shows that have gone through pre-production and planning that are ready to be post-produced in a week. Nor am I referring to situations where, after weeks of overages and staff conflicts, responsible adults finally step in and declare, "Shape up. We're done by the end of the week." I'm referring specifically and precisely to producers and execs who declare all of a sudden springing on everyone, that a 30-minute show needs to be edited in one week.

I've actually completed shows in a week – many of them. I've completed shows in a day – many of them. No one running any of those shows ever declares, "This has to be done by the end of the week." They don't have to. They prepare. This spurious declaration is an act of desperation and incompetence, a self-guaranteeing failure by people that don't actually know how to produce. Know it when you hear it. The underlying managerial logic goes like this: "Tell them the show has to be done by the end of the week. It'll get them motivated. They'll rally, we'll get the show done earlier than it otherwise would have been done, and overall we'll save money. Bonus: when they 'fail' the 1-week deadline, they're in our debt." The real fail: **this approach**. Everywhere it's used it creates crisis, and the delusion of a team that pulls together to overcome the crisis. It creates confusion and chaos. It fails not just to finish the show in a week, it slows things down overall. It fails to save money, and it fails to produce a good show. Know it when you see it.

A PREVIEW OF AUTUMN'S FIRST FRAME

This spring the Tate Gallery mounts the first major retrospective of the work of film artist Sir Isaac Julien - **What Freedom Is to Me**. For over twenty years, Julien has collaborated with film editor and BFE member, Adam Finch, and together they have pioneered the development of storytelling across multiple screens - from early diptych and triptych works to more recent epic works for up to ten screens, many of which will be on show.



In the next issue, Adam will share insights into the particular challenges of this form of montage. Meanwhile the show can be seen between 26th April and 20th August at Tate Britain.

For those visiting Los Angeles, an early triptych work, **Baltimore**, is on show at The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures until April 9th 2023

WE, PIGEONS, WE HAPPY PIGEONS, WE BAND OF PIGEONS...

(All Very Attached To Or Glued Into Our Holes)

by Alan Miller BFE

Editor's Note: This article is mostly aimed at those at the start of their careers. I hope it's sound advice if you have the personality to make things happen but it's a little late for some of us...

"No one later in life wishes they were sixteen again. We all wish we were sixteen again, **knowing what we know now...**"

Professor Brin Hamer-Jones

'put (someone) in a pigeonhole'

to unfairly think of or describe (someone or something) as belonging to a particular group, having only a particular skill, etc.

"She's a talented editor **who doesn't want to be put in a pigeonhole.**"

A decade ago, I wrote an impassioned and lengthy letter in response to an article in the latest *First Frame* addressing the in-built oddness of awards. It's how I became 'volunteered' to edit the magazine in the first place.

Recognising excellence is one thing but comparing vastly different work is another. It's a thorny subject. My letter railed against producers staunchly believing that only a documentary editor can cut docs, a reality editor cut reality shows, a feature editor, features. You get the drift. When I heard that a producer had hired an editor known for one area to cut a markedly different film in another area, you'd think I'd have been really happy. I was actually incensed. I was present at an overseas awards ceremony when they handed out the Best Editing gong. The winner wasn't present but his producer essentially congratulated himself for having the insight to hire a feature/drama editor for an animal documentary as if the experience of editing drama was something the natural history editor would not be able to do. This is why I have so little hair.

As a collective, we all must sign up for the mission impossible of tearing up that hoary old canard and wrenching it out of producers' minds. Yes, editors specialise in certain genres but the canny ones amongst us diversify and enjoy active careers across a range of projects, each satisfying some aspect of a normal but complex human being's character. But there are so few of us that realise such an idyllic personal and professional status quo.

"...the art and craft of editing relies on us having an acute sensibility and experience in one thing ...

...storytelling."



While in other vocations, specialisation is key to employability and experience at the same job inevitably leads to some mastery unless one's mind and heart are closed to what experience has to teach us. So, I'm not advocating that a plumber with no pilot training in their past fly me to Spain and nor am I supporting the idea that a Classics Oxford Don could successfully diagnose my hiatus hernia. But I am saying that a feature editor could effortlessly cut a documentary and vice versa. Why? Because the art and craft of editing relies on us having an acute sensibility and experience in one thing – storytelling. *Everything is storytelling.* Everything else is your relationship with your key team. From a 30 second advert to the 9 hours and 26 minutes of **Shoah**... it's all storytelling.

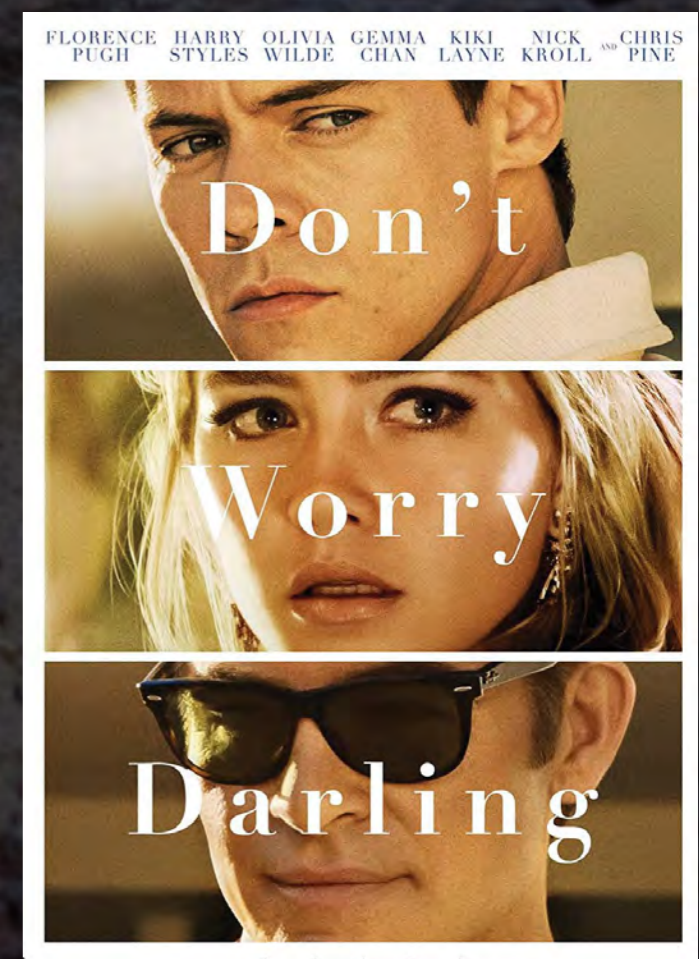
But, I hear you cry, producers only have an editor's CV to go on and if they've not cut an expensive action picture before, they're not landing the next Bond gig. I get this and the money at that highest of high end of editorial achievement is more than enough to keep those top 5% working in the same genre time and no time to die again. Very happily, thank you very much. But money doesn't define our lives however much importance we ascribe to it. I am very well aware that this article (being written on the day of Queen's funeral a long time ago last September) may be being insensitive given how poverty will increase and has gone up alarmingly as people struggle to pay their over-inflated energy bills. Some people are defined by their lack of resources and that's a tragedy given what individuals have to contribute. As I leave the supermarket, I shake my head at the need for food bank donations. It's the United Kingdom in 2023.

There is great wisdom in two clichés I have come to love and embrace. The first is 'There's no time like the present.' If you give that some thought, its profundity might shock you. Now is it, folks. That's all we have. The other, perverted somewhat by a commercial for rum a long time ago, is 'Variety is the spice of life.' If I was making a ton of money cutting **Avengers V** to **XII**, I'm certain there'd be some part of me saying, "God, I wouldn't mind a **My Dinner With Andre** just for a change..."

In fact, Actual Glass of Wine guest Paul Machliss admitted how relieved he was just cutting two actors in a dialogue scene after months and months of working on a superhero film with people who shoot lasers from their eyes! So, as that aforementioned mission impossible may be impossible in my lifetime, I'd like to propose a defence against pigeonholing producers to those starting out on their film and television careers as an editor. Taking a chance on someone new, someone inexperienced, someone experienced (but not in doing what you want them to do) or just someone unsuited in other ways to do the job *is just not what producers do*. And logic dictates neither should they. In every business a manager's job is to hire the best team to get the job done. When asked what producers do, veteran producer Michael Deeley gave the best answer... "Whatever's necessary."

Rookies make tea (regardless of their film school certificate announcing that they are a graduate cinematographer), experienced people in other areas have to stick to those areas, and unsuitable people are those who've garnered a reputation for being difficult or disruptive to a team effort. Filmmaking is hard enough. A little bird told me that producers on Amazon's *The Rings of Power* specifically wanted people who know their jobs and can work frictionless with others, egotism being actively discouraged. Director and actress Olivia Wilde put this a little more succinctly crewing up for **Don't Worry Darling**... "No assholes." It seemed from the oft reported behind the scenes brouhaha, this was an industry wide issue.

So if there is any advice to be given to those starting their careers in the industry, it is simply this; choose the area in which you have the most passion to work and stick to it. I would go so far as to suggest turning down jobs in a different area.



I originally used the word genre but that's too specific a word. By areas I mean Scripted Drama (film and TV), Reality TV, Documentary (film and TV) and Wildlife Documentary (film and TV) and in almost all of those preceding areas under the umbrella of Animation. As Claudia Giancola wisely told us in *First Frame* Spring 2021, animation is not a genre. Most output falls within those broad categories. The word 'genre' splits them down further but editors don't seem to have a problem with getting and doing work across genres... It's across areas where the barriers go up. Only today, I read in a BFE newsletter that a production was looking for 'an action' editor. I stand before you and weep. A famous editor of my acquaintance was in an interview and asked if he could edit action. "If you can direct it, yes!" He didn't get the gig. I mean, have you ever heard of an 'action editor'?

But it is an industry truism (one which I would have loved to have been made aware of in the late 80s!) that the more you work in a specific area, the more you are known for that work. Job after job, you don't always notice, but the walls either go up, making it very difficult to scale them to find work in another area or the rut gets deeper and deeper with the same effect. Before you know it, you have mastery over your skill in one area and that's only what producers see on a CV. Experience counts. So if you're happy working at your skill in that one area, then fine but if like me, you believe that variety makes things, uh... spicier, you really have to network to increase the luck you need to straddle areas and network early. When it comes to your CV, think different... CV... Cultivate Variety.

The point I'm making is that while experience in one area is always valuable, your money in the bank so to speak, the essential skill you have is one *that can be applied to all areas*. Plumbers and electricians do not have that 'can apply craft in other areas' luxury. TV and filmmaking is *telling stories* and you are above all, a *storyteller*. While producers will always only ever hire people who have done a very similar job to the one they are hiring for, it's worth sticking to your area if you are passionate and committed. I can't see Eddie Hamilton signing up for a modest Channel 5 documentary while he's deservedly flying so high right now.

But if you really want to vary your roster of work, emphasize the storytelling aspect of your skills and pitch yourself to a bigger spread of potential employers. It really does make a difference if you meet these people in person – just a short rendezvous. Target those whose work you've been moved by whatever area the work falls under. I had a friend recommend I meet someone at a production company, a company that would be a good fit with my experience. As I walked in to the Soho offices, the poster of the rather brilliant **Searching for the Sugar Man** greeted me, one of my favourite feature docs. It felt like I was home from home. While your CV may not be as full as you'd like, the more variety you add to it, the spicier your professional life will be and the more career desire itches will be scratched. If nothing else, you'll be able to effortlessly hold your own at any dinner parties.



Post Script:

Here are five qualities I think that are essential to someone embarking on a career in the film and television industry. This may qualify across the board as essentials for almost every desired job. In alphabetical order:

Ambition, Enthusiasm, Luck, Persistence and Talent

The acronym PLATE will help you remember them and if you have more of a flowery memory, then try PETAL. Let's play a little game. Imagine them in order of importance. How would you order them? Here's mine

1. **Persistence**

Production companies, in normal circumstances, can pick and choose their editors and no one hires an editor with nothing on their CV. But if you are not persistent in knocking on those doors behind which lies your dream job, then the one you want may never open. If you examine all the other qualities listed, none holds a candle to persistence. To quote Roger Nygard again...

"Be persistent. Unless you get a job in your field, don't stop. If they say no, move on to the next. Luck is another word for persistence." R.N.

...which brings us neatly on to:

2. **Luck**

You usually have no control of luck. Luck, by its very definition is serendipitous, and can fall in front of you like an autumn leaf but how can you catch it? That's actually easier to answer than it sounds. The American Founding Father Thomas Jefferson is thought to be the originator of the following quote: "I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions from that golden nugget.

3. **Enthusiasm**

If you have no desire or not a strong enough desire, you will not move forward in the film and TV industry. You are forever competing with people with a real passion. In my childhood, with my strong enthusiasm and passion for film and TV, I was seen as a somewhat geeky outlier. Now it's a badge of pride and less than stellar filmmakers old and new have failed to place a dent in that passion.

4. **Talent**

"At number four? Is he kidding?" No. There is some truth to the cliché that talent will out but there's also a lot of evidence to suggest that persistence, luck and enthusiasm have to get you there first. Take heart that an Orson Welles level talent kick starts a career in your twenties very, very rarely. A young Steven Spielberg's talent was recognised early and the success of **Jaws** just delivered him 'final cut' for the rest of his career. Most of us start the career mountain at the bottom and slowly make our way up. Talent is something only others can recognise when you're already climbing.

5. **Ambition**

You will find that whatever ambitions you have for yourself, you'll have to be laser focussed to keep on the right road. Life and luck sometimes buffet you and push you in different directions and those places can have their own rewards. Remember the curse of ambition that can be summed up in what you may think once an ambition is realised... "Now what?" On this subject, I sometimes imagine that Blofeld has defeated James Bond, he has the world in his clutches and sits behind an enormous marble desk ruling over everyone. His ambition of world domination is realised. I imagine him cleaning his nails, ordering some sushi but most of all thinking "Now what do I do?"

THE CAPTURE



(T)RUTHLESS IN PURSUIT OF POWER

Why *The Capture* May Be The Most Important TV Drama Ever Made

by Sue Levis



Editor's Note: Two years ago, in the Spring 2021 issue of First Frame, Ms. Levis wrote about the dangers of deep fakes and how our democracies might be eroded and indeed lost because of them. Ever since Jordan Peele's 2018 warning video of ex-President Obama deep faked but not so perfectly that we couldn't tell, we have been alert to how faked images and video can sway hearts and minds. But technology doesn't march, it bounds. We are edging closer to a world in which we will not be able to tell a digital likeness on video from the real thing. This will inevitably diminish our public discourse and cause great swathes of people to be taken in by errant and malicious lies from bad actors. But this one TV series may unwittingly prove to be the greatest Public Information Film of all.

Public Information Films used to be dry, functional and declarative. Most centred on warning drinkers of the dangers of driving while intoxicated. Children were treated to the most evil man in the Galaxy teaching them how to cross the road safely but Darth Vader had his Green Cross Code Man costume on (but we were never fooled despite the obviously fake West Country accent). The ones I remember as a young child growing up in the 70s, were those with a small unnamed boy and his cat, Charlie, animated more crudely than

South Park. The cat was the one with all the post-accident wisdom even though the boy had to translate the meows... "Charlie says..." became the unofficial name of the half dozen or so adverts warning you about playing with matches, the dangers of deep water and going off with someone without telling mummy... Well, in the 80s, a new kind of PIF was born, the one designed to scare you to death because of this new virus that laid waste to your immune system. The AIDS awareness campaign was narrated by Mr. Gravel-voice himself, John Hurt.

But what happens when very real threats to society are hidden, disbelieved or ignored? Big tech has changed the political landscape. People can now be individually targeted and bombarded privately by torrents of misinformation, ads which disappear like smoke from your social media timelines. And that tech is knocking on the door of being able to represent a digital human in a video indistinguishable from a real person. Imagine we are already there.

Welcome to the world of *The Capture*. Our world.

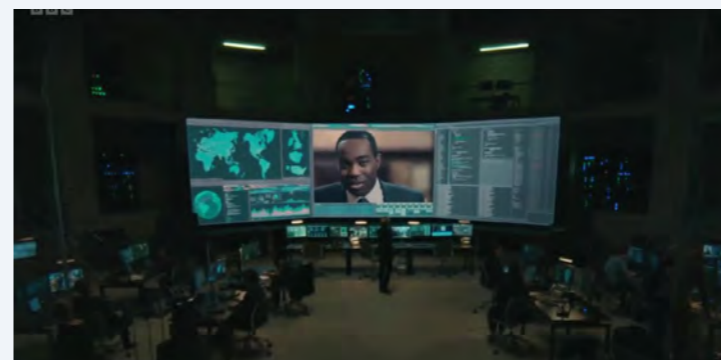


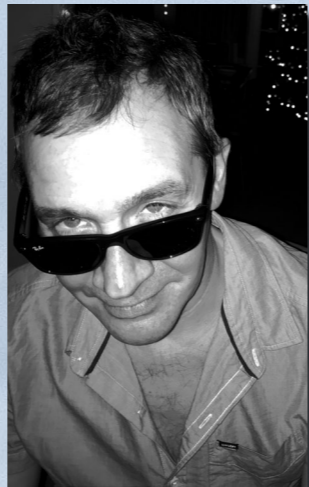
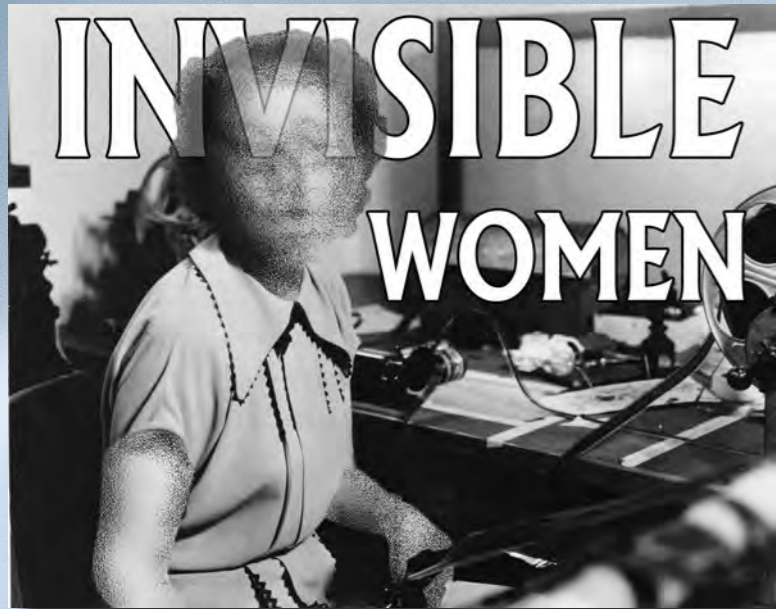
The Capture was created, written and directed by Ben Chanan. He had some directorial help in the second series from James Kent and Phillipa Langdale. It's present day UK and a soldier is on trial for illegally killing an insurgent in Afghanistan. He is acquitted on the evidence of a video expert who claims the sound recorded on the GoPro-alike body cam had drifted several seconds out of sync being operational for an hour thereby proving the soldier shot the insurgent *after* giving a clear verbal warning. Later, CCTV shows him in a romantic clinch with his barrister who then boards a bus home leaving the soldier ruminating on a possible romance... At the end of episode one, he is shown what the CCTV camera picked up. As the bus passes, he and the barrister have a semi-violent altercation and the barrister is dragged against her will out of frame left. The astonishment on the soldier's face as he sees what he knows to be fake propels us forward into a very well made TV series that entertains, thrills, sometimes befuddles but most importantly of all, *informs*.

Fast tracked DI Carey (Holliday Granger, taking time out from playing a detective in the *Strike* TV adaptations to play another one in *The Capture*) is at first sceptical and then disbelieving until several events turn her reluctance to believe into a desire to uncover the truth. We know how serious the stakes are (and nodding to the US market) because they've cast Hellboy himself, Ron Perlman as CIA Chief Frank Napier. Hell, they even bagged the eternally youthful Famke Janssen to play his senior. The second series follows a politician seduced by a presentation of 'Truro Analytica' (not even the smallest effort is made to pretend it's 'not really' the famous Cambridge Analytica, the company that has thrust us into Trumpistan and Brexitopia). Shockingly now on the side of the digital manipulators, DI Carey is now waging a clandestine internal war against her employers gathering evidence against the fakers until the time is right to show her hand. Events escalate, lives are lost, plans are hatched and schemes are blown apart until you find yourself second guessing every character's moves and counter-moves. That said, the denouement of series two is very satisfying and I suspect more so if you manage to take in all the details and nuances of the plot. A second viewing after some digestion of the first is on the cards.

Yes, there will be no doubt, that millions watching will believe all this digital witchcraft only exists in the realms of science fiction but many will start to think that if this sort of thing is now possible, "...what can I possibly trust on screen ever again?" That's the right question to ask. The first faked CCTV footage was conventionally done with human participants with added facial replacement. What's most unbelievable is the assertion that this can be done in close to 'real time' while many experts say that hacking into and altering a CCTV camera image in real time is impossible. Yesterday it was impossible. Perhaps today it's a little closer to possible. However you feel about what's possible, it's almost a certainty that you are misinformed if only due to the inevitability of tomorrow making today an underachieving, ignorant and unintentional liar.

Newspapers, online news sites and documentaries, however well informed, well intentioned and well, ambitious, do not, even collectively, have the reach or engagement of a must see drama on prime time television (*not sure about that* – Ed). Am showing my age here because that previous assertion is probably not as true as I think and hope it is. Drama can present a world very much like ours and nestle a nugget of truth at its core. If it gets people talking, now more aware of what might be possible, we have a chance of not letting the fakes overwhelm us. If a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, then 12 hours of quality drama may help the unpalatable and frankly astonishing but unbelievable digital fakery be accepted into the mainstream and critically recognised as such.





by Suzanne Baily and Nick Baily
(with capsule reviews by the Editor)



Dede Allen (90' 49")



Celebrated in *First Frame* more than once, the great Dede Allen is championed by those she mentored including master editors Mick Audsley and Steve Rotter. Her son, Tom Fleischman adds to the appreciation. Fleischman went on to a very successful career as a re-recording mixer. Intercut is a VHS quality interview with Allen so she is very well represented. It was heart-warming to know that Warren Beatty continued to pay Allen out of his own pocket once she was fired off *Bonnie and Clyde* (a fate she knew was coming as the movie was so revolutionary).

Editor's Note: If you care about and want to learn acres more about our craft, do not delay. These films are made to spread the editorial word and if you can help further spread it, let me know.

Introducing **Invisible Women** - a documentary film series celebrating some great female talent, helping to shed light on the art of film editing for both students and film fans. The series includes two feature length documentaries. Our ninety minute Dede Allen film includes contributions from her son, Oscar winning sound mixer Tom Fleischman, Oscar winning editor Stephen Rotter and award winning editor Mick Audsley. Representing the British, our film on Victoria Boydell includes insights from directors John Madden, Rufus Norris, and our resident professor Mick Audsley, and the wonderful Victoria Boydell talks about her editing process. We plan to make two more films - about Emma Hickox and her mum, the legendary Anne Coates - when Emma's schedule allows.

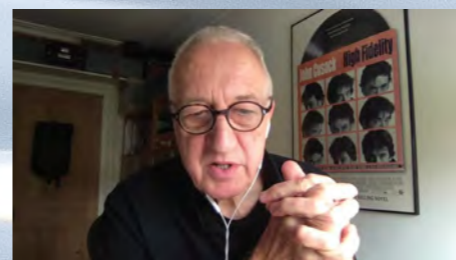
Three shorter completed films look at Hollywood giants Margaret Booth, head of editing at MGM for 30 years, Dorothy Spencer, who worked for John Ford, Ernst Lubitsch and Alfred Hitchcock, and Verna Fields, Oscar winning editor of *Jaws*, with a contribution from the much missed Peter Bogdanovich. We hope the films are of interest to BFE's members, and we welcome any suggestions about getting these films out to a wider audience, or to share with film schools. Once we have completed the last two films, we plan to make a two hour documentary from all seven films, that we hope will find a home on the BBC, Sky Arts or TCM.

Suzanne Baily is the figurehead of this project, one she has put together with zero budget at her kitchen table during lockdowns, assisted by her husband Nick who did, er, something or other. The idea came about after an interesting project idea for our client, screenplay writer and novelist William Boyd. When interviewing him, we talked about the film *Chaplin*. He wrote the screenplay for Richard Attenborough to direct, but the studio lost confidence and pulled out. Attenborough set the film up with another studio who wanted additional material written by William Goldman - as it turned out, additional material that was largely redundant. We came up with the idea to make an original writer's cut for Will to demonstrate how the film should have been released.

This proved to be more complicated than we initially thought, and we made a short film about the challenges of that process, 'How We Remade *Chaplin*', which is on YouTube at [hJps://youtu.be/GKTBkmEduNc](https://youtu.be/GKTBkmEduNc). (or go to Youtube and Search for "Chaplin: How We Remade It" - Ed.)

The idea for the **Invisible Women** series emanated from that challenging but enjoyable creative process. You can watch or download the films from Dropbox via;

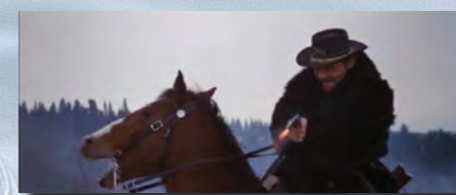
www.invisiblewomen.org



'Professor' Mick Audsley



Editor Steve Rotter



That extraordinary scene from *Little Big Man*

I was also stunned at the emotional power of a short clip from *Little Big Man*, intensified, surprisingly by the lack of sound. Like Verna Fields, Allen accepted a studio role later in her career overseeing and problem solving with other editors rather than using her power to overturn their creative decisions. And it's always a joy to be reminded of her work on the most eclectic of movies. Her staying on *Molly Ringwald* as she's torn to shreds by Judd Hirsch in *The Breakfast Club* is a masterclass of when not to cut. We finish on a well-known piece of advice which broadens out to many arts and crafts but it's never a mistake to keep reminding people... "You can't break the rules unless you know the rules."



Margaret Booth (08' 37")



Certainly Booth was not as invisible as all that given that she personally supervised the post-production of over a thousand MGM movies. Having read memoirs by filmmakers who worked during her tenure, there was always a sense that you had to get your work 'past Booth' to stand any chance of finishing the film the way the filmmakers intended. She was feared probably because she exercised her power unlike Dede Allen who used hers to collaborate to improve the films she worked on. But there is no doubt of Booth's editing skills. Just that opening of *Mutiny on the Bounty* tells you she was a master craftsman.



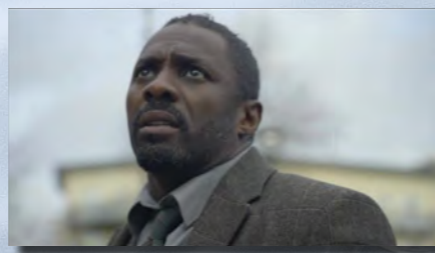
Dorothy Spencer (18' 52")



If John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, and Elia Kazan all ask for you to cut their films more than once, you could say that the rest of the CV could be empty and Spencer would still shine. I loved the story that John Ford wouldn't even watch his films until Spencer had finished her cut and never asked for changes. That's trust. I know there's not too much to be unearthed about this truly invisible woman but her work is still out there, still thrilling audiences. However briefly, Dorothy, it was lovely to meet you.



Victoria Boydell (61' 05")



I had the great pleasure of meeting Victoria at a BFE event at Goldsmiths some years ago. Directors John Madden and Rufus Norris contribute as well as editor Mick Audsley. We get a great behind the scenes breakdown of working on **Broken**, a favourite of hers. But it's her being in the room with Terry Gilliam and Mick during **12 Monkeys** which makes my eyes bright emerald. What a great experience.

Victoria also explains editing for a broadcaster with ad breaks and the placement of mild cliff-hangers. Because of the good hour's running time, we get to spend quite some time with Victoria. All the other invisible women have long since passed on so it is refreshing to be in the subject's company for a significant time. And she is brimming over with great tips and stories. There are many clips of Victoria's terrifically cut sequences featured and the thoughtful narration, sometimes playful but always respectful, sums up all of Victoria's strengths as an editor and collaborator before the little Easter egg of Mick Audsley at the end. Of the five films, you learn more about the craft with Victoria because she's such an inspiring guide.

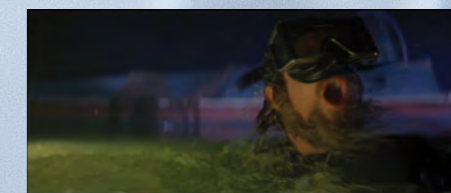
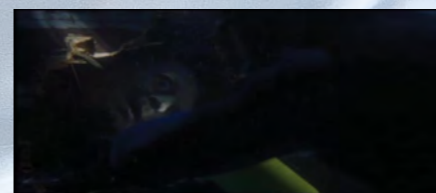


Verna Fields (18' 39")



Lovely to hear from Peter Bogdanovich who died coincidentally a year to the day (January 6th) of this writing. To any **Jaws** fan, Fields' name is enshrined high up on a pedestal. Known for her sound work but having picture edited quite a few long forgotten films, she taught at the world famous University of Southern California where she hooked up with the Hollywood 'Movie Brats' (John Milius, George Lucas, Brian De Palma, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and later Steven Spielberg (who didn't go to USC).

As there are precious few clips of this extraordinary editor (accepting the Oscar for **Jaws** is about it), this tribute is very much clip based and who hasn't got time for great clips to show how an editor plies their craft. Like Dede Allen, she was offered a role outside of the editing room, this time one of President of Feature Production at Universal, which made her one of the most powerful people in Hollywood. Tragically cancer took her at the age of just 64.



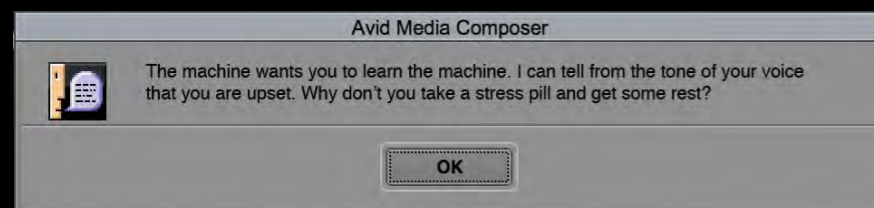
Suzanne and Nick are planning to make a documentary about **Ronin/Dune (1984)** editor Antony Gibbs. If anyone reading this who worked with or knew Antony, or who might be able to contribute information, please drop them a line at suz@laughingdog.co.uk. For enquires about the **Invisible Women** series, please email the same address.

Old School Digital Editorial Process as a Creative Tool

by

Nick Hector BFE CCE

'What is the machine asking me to do now?' It was the early 90s. As the first documentary film editor in Canada to embrace digital tools, I was able to augment my junior editor wages by training senior film cutters on the AVID. The question was posed by a soon-to-be-retired editor who was clearly overwhelmed with this radical change. While I started my career cutting celluloid film, I didn't use it enough to become emotionally attached. I had enthusiastically embraced digital editing; it was boundless creativity incarnate. The question, *'What is the machine asking me to do?'* was absurd. *'Technology is benign'*, I thought at the time. *'A tool is a tool'*. This problem has stayed in the back of my mind for the last thirty years as I've cut more than 150 films and programs. Now I'm trying to work it out through a research project I'm conducting at the University of Hertfordshire that is looking into the film editing process and its relationship to the style of documentaries.



The Digital Revolution

The advent of digital cinema triggered a substantial change in the traditions and logistics of post-production. Freed from purchasing expensive analogue film stock, the lower cost of digital production led to exponentially increasing volumes of rushes. Documentary shooting ratios increased from approximately 30:1 in the analogue film-based production I was cutting to as much as 300:1 in the contemporary digitally acquired productions I handle now. However, while the fixed costs of film editing (salaries, office rentals, expenses, etc.) have not also increased tenfold in the digital era, the time allotted to editing remains about the same. And so, editing methods were developed that prioritized financial and logistical considerations over creativity. For the documentary film editor, a primary digital advantage is an ability to superficially preview vast volumes of footage at high speed. We can blast through an hour of rushes literally in seconds to see what 'pops in a scrub'. Even so, the avalanche of escalating documentary shooting ratios meant that we started to farm out the screening of some of the rushes to assistants in the 2000s. In the 2010s, we saw the rise of the story editor, a specialist in third-party evaluation. In this decade, improved A.I. transcription services mean that we don't even need to screen anything before we start to have ideas on how we structure a documentary.

In the years after the smoke of the digital revolution cleared, a stylistic shift started to become evident in my creative work and that of my peers. Logic seems to have won over story, emotion, and tone in the documentary style wars. Pacing is tighter, visual narratives degenerated to 'B-roll', scenes are often reduced to 'sync bites', and structures are typically driven by dialogue.



Why? Evolving artistic innovation, stylistic trends, audience sensibilities, and political context have a significant influence on our work, but I began to sense a distinct relationship between tools and method, an interplay between the creative process and the documentaries we were making. I began to wonder: is the documentary film-editing process simply a necessary product of 'line items', 'deliverables', and 'picture lock dates', or is it a useful artistic tool? What are the artistic implications of using an analogue working method in a digital setting?

The Research Project

In the spring of 2021, I began exploring this question through a research project at Herts. It involved editing two versions of a documentary using the same rushes and digital tools but with two distinctly different processes. In the first version, *The Way Back #1, Additive*, I used a contemporary digital-era approach. I scanned the rushes, transcribed the dialogue, drafted a paper edit, and then cut the film in an additive approach. Starting with a blank timeline, I added the shots one by one, modifying and rearranging them as the cut progressed. Many editors liken this approach to painting. We start with a blank canvas and impose our vision onto it. A second film, *The Way Back #2, Subtractive*, was cut using the same rushes and the same digital tools. But in this version, I cut the film on a computer in the way we used to cut unscripted docs on analogue film: no transcripts, paper edits, planning, or scanning. Each day's rushes were strung out in continuity, and I watched everything in real-time. I cut the string-outs in shooting order, removing one shot after another, gradually boiling the footage down. We used to compare this method to stonemasonry. The editor chips away at the block of stone, revealing the essence of what was always in there.



The rushes I used were shot for the 2016 Canadian feature documentary *How to Prepare for Prison* by the acclaimed director-cinematographer Matt Gallagher. These raw materials document the criminal trial of Mlinzi McMillan, a man wrongfully accused of the vehicular manslaughter of his two sons. While driving his two boys on the way back home from football practice, Mlinzi's car tragically collided with a heavily laden articulated lorry that was lost in a residential neighbourhood. Gallagher filmed Mlinzi and his attorney Michael Sharpe as they fought to prove his innocence in a criminal trial that dragged on sporadically for 18 months. As Mlinzi's vindication happily precluded him from *Prison's* story focus, his rushes were excluded from the cut before they entered the editing room. This decision weighed heavily on Gallagher and his team. Mlinzi had generously opened his life up to the camera, providing intimate access to his thoughts and feelings as Mlinzi struggled to cope with the death of his children while facing as many as 15 years of imprisonment. The filmmakers shared his desire to tell the story of his vindication. An exploration of this material promised to serve the needs of the subject, filmmaker, and researcher alike.



The Edit

And so, I dug in. In *The Way Back #1, Additive*, I followed standard operating procedures. Gallagher shot a Mlinzi formal sit-down interview at the start of principal photography, so I started there. It provided a dramatic question 'will the trial fill in the holes of a memory shattered by trauma and injury'. I then used it to construct an intimate interview-driven personal reflection narrative arc that I cross-cut with moments from the trial. While I started the trial's narrative arc with opening statements, I then found it necessary to simplify and reorder its structure. In real life, there's no obvious order to the presentation of witnesses in open court. You may hear disordered testimony about the aftermath of the incident first, then details of the tragedy, and finally, its context. After the prosecution questions each witness, the defence is allowed to cross-examine. It's incredibly slow, repetitive, and disjointed. And so, I reorganized the prosecution's case into a story order. It's a standard courtroom drama approach that allows the editor to create a tight, compelling, and cogent story. In my edit, after the prosecution rests, the defence lawyer comes in and effectively thwarts the people's case. This, too, was laid out in a logical order rather than trial order. As the trial scenes were shot with a single camera, cross-cutting characters made the editing much easier. Rather than worrying about continuity or scene mechanics, I could simply cut to a new character. It allowed me to compress time and cut to the essence of the dialogue.



The old-school cutting method of *The Way Back #2, Subtractive* was simpler in many ways but much more time-consuming. The subtractive method forces the editor to focus on each scene, one by one, in shooting order. I would screen each scene in real-time and then consider its narrative point. This slow and thorough approach reveals the nuance in the rushes. Then, I incrementally boiled it down until the scene was a distillation of what had happened in that time and place.

It's a method that I learned from 'direct cinema' pioneer Allan King, best known for *Warrendale* (1967), which tied with Antonioni's *Blow Up* for a Best Foreign Film BAFTA. He used to say that material should argue its way out of a film. If rushes, the filmic representation of real life, represent the truth (or some sort of truth), the editor needs to ask themselves what they choose to exclude and why. In addition to the slowness of real-time screening, it requires a lot of 'think time'. Sometimes the process makes things faster and easier.



Without the need for planning, transcripts, an edit script, or a paper edit, I could just dive right in and start working with the material. Moreover, it occasionally encourages the editor to drop entire sections. For example, the formal sit-down interview shot at the beginning of production is not classically a 'scene'. As it is not an active present-tense moment of unfolding action, I eliminated it entirely. However, by removing the possibility of a character-based voiceover, I radically changed how the film could be constructed. The scenes needed to be cogent and engaging self-contained narrative blocks, constructed as geographically and temporally distinct units with a beginning, middle and end. As the camera was not allowed to reposition during the proceedings, the single-camera coverage was limited. It was extremely difficult to cut. If there is a universal trait of film editors, laziness is not it. I was comfortable taking on the extra work and the time that it took but painfully aware that as this was a research project, I did not have to justify my invoicing to a sceptical producer.

The Films

A comparison of the finished documentaries is revealing. Anyone who has been around the editorial block a few times suspects there is a connection between process and result. But what's interesting is the scale and nature of the difference.



The Way Back #1, Additive

To the layperson, a screening of the 34m additive version reveals a straightforward and linear doc. However, my BFE peers will immediately note that it is essentially an extended montage that takes liberties with time and space. Real-life causal chronological events have been reorganized and presented in a simplified and logical fashion to create the illusion of order, comprehensiveness, and depth. For example, I use Mlinzi's formal interview, filmed before the trial, as commentary on events that *had not yet occurred at the time of the interview*. His emotional reaction to the court's verdict of not guilty, while consistent with the facts, was expressed in relation to an earlier unfiled trial in which Mlinzi was tried for a lesser charge. This recontextualisation falls within the bounds of accepted ethics of professional practice. While I am ethically comfortable with the use of this technique in this context, it contributes to what I perceive as a veneer of artificiality. Moreover, the inorganic dramatic question posed in the film: 'Will Mlinzi learn what happened on that tragic day?' was filmed a year before the trial. It is simplistic and artificial, unnecessarily undermining the nuance and tension of what is, in fact, a dramatic trial.

Moreover, the standard use of character voice-over creates a barrier to immersion. When I screen this version, I don't feel like I'm entering the scene. I understand the story, but I don't feel it. The brisk pace and compact structure leave little room for subtext. Filmic time reflects the creative hand of the editor rather than real-world temporality.

The bottom line: the additive process of standard practice seems to foster a cogent, temporally efficient, and straightforward documentary that plays as an engineered and filtered experience. The editor imposes themselves on the material. While all documentary filmmaking is susceptible to subjective decision-making, the additive approach seems particularly vulnerable. Here's a [link](https://tinyurl.com/bdctfdnh).

<https://tinyurl.com/bdctfdnh>



The Way Back #2, Subtractive

The second version, cut from the same materials using an analogue-era subtractive process, is distinctly different to the expert eye. This subtractive approach to digital film editing encourages the editor to consider the material within its temporal or geographic context. Thus, abstract arrangements are discouraged. Rather than an extended montage, this 56m film has taken the form of a narrativised human story constructed from real-life events. Its linear, temporally, and geographically compartmentalised structure presents a series of clearly defined active present-tense causal-chronological scenes. On-screen events determine the time base and structure of the documentary, not the editor's planning document.

The editorial pacing of the scenes is rooted in the pacing of the rushes. This approach makes meaning. For example, the timing of the defence attorney's responses is loaded with significance. He uses pauses for emphasis and to let a statement resonate. A pause followed by a request for clarification signals disbelief. The ponderous tempo of the trial, while heavily mitigated through the removal of repetition and pauses, is much truer to life. However, this pacing is rarely seen in cinema and will likely seem tedious if considered within contemporary genre expectations. However, this also provides a sense of immersion, of having been there. The length of the judicial process - months rather than days - is made clear. Consequently, this version is more narratively complex than the guided experience fostered by the additive editing process. The subtractive approach created room for subtext. For example, the judge's concern about the duration of the trial subtly reminds us of its socio-economic context. A subtle tension between the judge and the defence attorney suggests systemic bias against the defendant.



The bottom line: The analogue-era subtractive approach fosters an immersive, organic experience that focuses on story rather than information. The editor reveals the story within the material. Here's a [link](https://tinyurl.com/2p8knvbs).

<https://tinyurl.com/2p8knvbs>

The Process Tool

I'm not arguing for a preferred method. This research project simply makes clear that there is a relationship between cutting method and style. Moving forward, I'm going to try to harness it as an artistic tool that can be applied at the act, scene or sub-scene level, not just the project. It has also helped me work out a better answer to the question, 'What is the machine asking me to do now?'. It's not really asking us to do anything. But it makes strong recommendations. Life can be boring, illogical, and messy. Documentarians must resist blindly following the lead of a machine that denies the untidiness of human existence, encouraging its user to mirror its logical and mechanical nature.



Nick Hector BFE CCE is a Canadian Screen, HotDocs, Canadian Cinema Editors, Directors Guild of Canada, and Gemini Award-winning documentary film editor and educator. His chapter *The Hero Myth and the Cutting Room Floor* will be published in the forthcoming edited volume *The Routledge Companion to History and the Moving Image*.

(L)AWFUL PERSECUTION

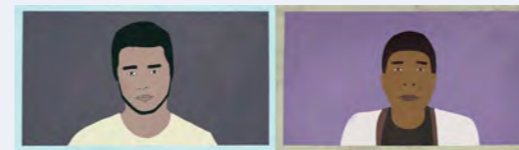
Editing *Gay Under The Taliban* by Todd Dalton

I've been (sporadically) working, over the last 12 months, with a lovely company called Rogan Productions. In total I've done 5 docs with them, the last one being a thoroughly enjoyable geek-fest about technology in the eighties and how it shaped the world today. It's one of 3 episodes in the series called *Made In The 80's: The Decade That Shaped Our World* on Channel 4, the other two being about the cold war and the music culture but also encompassing the terrible emergence of AIDS.

The fourth of these docs is *Gay Under The Taliban*, I hadn't long completed their C4 special about Boris Johnson (remember him?) Given the fun and games to be had in a current affairs programme that went from a 5 week edit to a 2 week one pretty much overnight, I was surprisingly happy to agree to another C4 doc of (at that time) indeterminate duration.

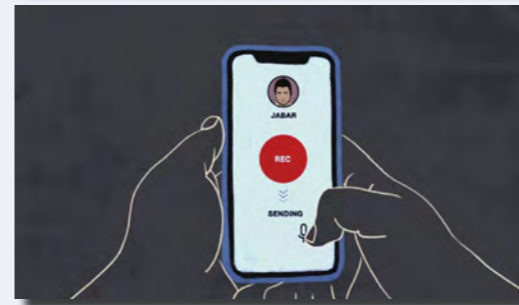
Gay Under The Taliban is a documentary about how life for the LGBTQ+ community in Afghanistan has changed since the international armed forces had left the country to the control of the Taliban in 2021. It's scripted entirely from text messages, voice messages and social media postings. The director/producer Dan Hall had, by means that can never be told, got in touch with some hundred or so LGBTQ+ people who were/are living in appalling conditions in Afghanistan. Not being of a 'traditional' disposition is seen as a grave crime in that country and, although some individuals will turn a blind eye, most do not. It's fair to say that notifying the authorities of 'strange' behaviour, beatings, and generally excluding LGBTQ+ from society are all normal.

Eventually, Dan chose four contributors to represent this persecuted community in Afghanistan.



Noor is a medic whose boyfriend keeps him in a basement and at one point starts bringing men round, taking money from them to have sex with Noor.

Jabar, a young journalist, had been writing articles during the international occupation which told the truth about the Taliban's cruel views on family life - the Taliban was only too aware of these reports and Jabar lived in fear of violence and recrimination.



Odessa worked in television production and despite being a lesbian she was forcibly married to an army general. The general was jailed during the occupied years for domestic violence towards her but when the Taliban took over, it let all criminals loose. She tried to escape the country but the general's contacts were everywhere and she had to abandon one attempted border crossing before lying about a fictional husband being in the neighbouring country of Pakistan in order to flee. At one point during production she disappeared for two months.



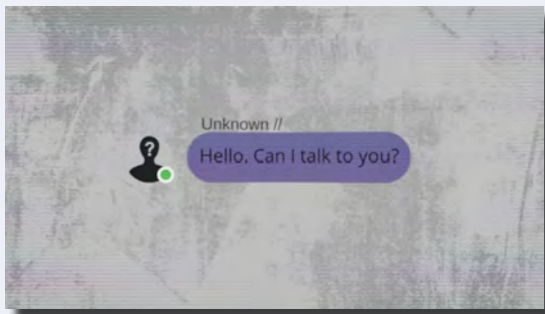
Habib's mum is terminally ill in hospital. He struggles to go out during the day because he admits that his mannerisms would single him out as not straight. Acting publicly this way would bring the attention of the Taliban foot soldiers down on him. His house was raided by the police but Habib managed to disguise himself as a woman and they left him alone.

Contact with the contributors was built up over months, with Dan's sympathetic ear a blessed relief for them. I just can't imagine the conversations that were had to manage their expectations and be upfront about his reasons for speaking to them. This all culminated in the project getting to the edit suite on the proviso that no one would be shown on screen (animations would depict them with not-very-lookalike portraits which are much more beautiful than a wobbly blur over someone's face!) and no one's voice would be heard (actors would read their words). Dan had envisioned something that could hold the viewer and pull them into the stories despite us never seeing or hearing the real people.

To play out the scenes of beatings and violence with hand-drawn animations, Dan turned to Alice Bibette, an artist based in France. Her remit for how the animations were to look was very much an old-school, 'analogue' style - no clean, straight lines. Dan and Alice spent a good few weeks working through mock-ups and colour palettes. Dan has a little obsession with colours; the choice of which blue to make the comm on the script document took a while...

There were to be no animations - even holding stills - until the palette for each character was nailed. In this project we needed as many devices as possible to help audiences differentiate one unseen contributor from another. Scenes were all drawn, or roto-scoped from filming members of the Rogan team including Dan and his partner, as well as Alice with her colleagues in Paris, all acting out the brutal imagery.

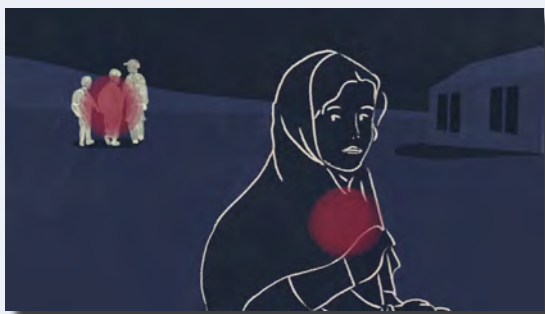




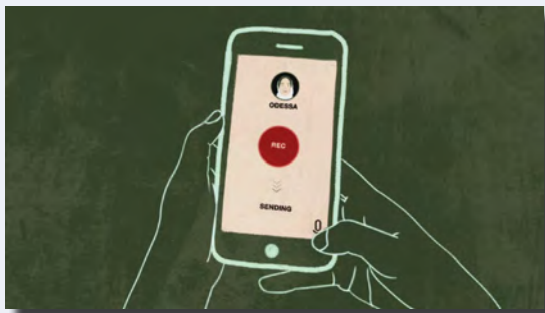
So together with the animations, some phone footage from a willing blogger and absolutely incredible footage from the on-location camera operator we hoped to depict what the contributors said. Dan even managed to craft some very nice graphics to play on the screen of his phone which was then filmed in the edit suite - an excellent visual device to imitate how he received the messages. Although by the time of post-production, Alice had a relatively complete brief to work to, the scenes could only start being drawn once the structure and story was in place. So to begin with, the edit was just given a couple of screen grabs. The composers, Paul Leonidou and Andy Pisanu (aka The Unstoppable Monsters) had come up with 4 or 5 mood tracks for us to work with.



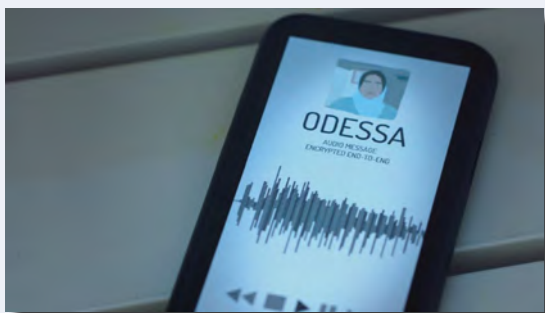
The first day in the edit Dan gave me a script which he'd bravely written (and was subsequently almost entirely abandoned) along with about 14 pages of social messaging texts selected seemingly (at that stage) at random from the hundreds he'd received from the contributors. The camera operator in Afghanistan had already passed on a drive full of filming of the last couple of years (they were Afghani themselves and did journalistic work normally - we were kindly given almost their entire library of Kabul GVs).



It didn't take long to realise that what I'd been handed in terms of this footage was just incredible. Nothing was undercover; walking alongside and filming foot soldiers complete with their guns as they patrolled around the streets of Kabul and getting them to pose with AK-47s; the camera operator seemed fearless. In my 'favourite' clip a close-knit group of 20 Taliban, all heavily armed and dressed in traditional garb, are followed for about 3 minutes walking quite nonchalantly into a derelict Kabul International Airport on the day of them taking over, it must have been only a matter of hours after the last military plane had left - cars lay strewn about with missile holes in them. Smiling at the camera and proudly showing off their guns they wandered seemingly without purpose. At one point the leader stops to ask a bystander the way to the main building. Much discussion and pointing follows before they thank him and stride off. When they reach the front doors they're locked so everyone stops for another chat and more pointing around. Then one of the gang notices a working vehicle over the other side of the car park and after some pointing and rearranging of guns on shoulders, they all traipse over to a tiny delivery truck and promptly pile in, guns an' all. How in God's name someone didn't sit on a trigger and cause a massacre is anyone's guess. The final part of the shot has the camera operator standing still filming the small truck driving off down the road piled high with Taliban waving their guns. And probably pointing.



For up to date GVs of the city, the blogger's phone footage could be 'ordered up' by messaging him from the edit suite all the way over to Kabul, he'd then go out and shoot what we'd requested and send it back to us: 'can we have a dark alley lit only by car headlights, please?' He desperately wants to be a journalist so was eager to help out. It was him that provided the footage of the chaos on the airport tarmac when the international forces were leaving Kabul; people running, carrying babies and children, panic-driven and trying to board the last couple of planes waiting to take off.



Using this collection of footage, I was able to pull together selected sequences before taking a look at the messages. Meanwhile Dan valiantly tried to rewrite the script which was to be discarded once more almost as completely as the first one. So the only option was, with Dan's in-depth knowledge of all their situations, for me to build a story from about 118 text messages. I've done small films with only a verbal brief, maybe a commercial spot with just a logo and a shot of a smiling customer, but I've never had to get a story from a pile of text messages.

To cut a guide comm and actor track, we roped in 4 colleagues from production to read each of the 4 contributors messages which I could then lay out on the timeline and interleave with each other. Although as time progressed Dan started to take on all the characters voices, changing his as much as possible to differentiate who was speaking.

The two exec's, Mark Hedgecoe and James Rogan, had been hoping for a 60 or even 90 minute epic of a programme, but C4 was more open to a half hour slot. Either way we agreed to aim for as long as was reasonable to tell the story and see where that got us.



The important thing for them was to tell the story foremost almost without any concern of it being broadcast - I got shouted at for continually asking what duration the final programme should be. In hindsight, it was the best thing they could have done.

By the second week, it was becoming clear that it would be the half hour. So we delivered a 42'-ish minute viewing copy that, well, could only be best described as a challenging watch. Filled with slates to indicate what would at some point be animation, the occasional sequence of wonderful footage from Afghanistan, and four different guide voices from people who would freely admit to not being professional voiceover artists, it was hard - if you weren't myself or Dan - to follow exactly which character was speaking however many slates I put in to describe the action as it would be.

The commissioning team at Channel 4 had their concerns allayed by the exec's and were supportive and constructive during more than one long Zoom call. So, with more clarity of the way ahead, we could turn to slowly but surely working towards the final version. In the end even though the messages formed the basis of the script, details needed to be disguised, so it was reasonable for us to use some artistic licence. Dan's graphics came together and he used their actual texts to put in speech bubbles which I placed over the voices. There was a wonderfully simple pleasure in timing the messages popping up on the phone with the guide voices.

After about 6 weeks in the edit suite, Dan and I managed to deliver a 37' programme which can be seen on Channel 4's streaming service. It was an edit experience that I never imagined I would have, and we hope the programme gives an insight into the terrible conditions endured by people who deserve to live life their way.



Running with the Devil

+
from the Benevolent Demon

+
Malevolent Angel Inside

by Loucaros (Luke) Eleftheriou

I just experienced **Running with the Devil: The Wild World of John McAfee**. It felt like being dropped into a slipstream of consciousness... In the apparent midst of the broad, intoxicating brush strokes of chaos, confusion and mercurial (cunningly intentional, or pathologically driven) psychosis (or absolute brilliance...?), there is a shot on a jarring level, in the scope of minutiae... of a small crab, hiding in its exoskeleton crawling solitarily across a cement slab. It conceals itself and yet lives within its environment and surroundings in broad daylight. But who does the fooling and who is being fooled? What or who is he hiding from? Who does the hiding and who is the hidden? Who is the hunter and who is the hunted? At which point does extreme affluence and corruption topple into the hunter becoming the hunted...of his own making? The ability to go by completely undetected as a result of using the whirlwind deflection of your larger-than-life, caricature persona becomes your biggest loophole/ally/mask.

Clearly McAfee's intellectual brilliance is poisoned, maligned by the grounding he received and the environment he was born into. He is a master engineer of manipulating narratives, and then at times becomes manipulated by his own engineered narratives/fiction/lies. And yet, was it delusion, drug-induced paranoia or rooted in fact, considering what he knew and allegedly had access to the greatest secrets of the most powerful organizations in the world?

The paranoia was palpable and remains palpable throughout the documentary... quite suffocating. Was it all fiction, delusions driven by the corruption of affluence, excess that can catapult the human condition into a realm of insanity... living above, absolved from all conventions, rules, regulations that the rest of society abides to and lives by? Was he running away from people on the exterior, or was he desperately trying to run away from himself? Was he desperately trying to run away from the demons percolating within his mind... and that constituted his 'being' ...a collective sum of his actions and deeds throughout his life... to-date? The hunter becomes the hunted and the hunted becomes the hunter... But who resides on which side of the divide and what determines the key point, which pivots, that defines the realm?

The evil, the shadow that resides in the darkest obscurity, in the thick darkness that sculpts the chiaroscuro at the core of the human condition... is very present. It almost seems to haunt McAfee himself. Yet, there are some fascinating contradictions. In the heart of all that madness, in the moment of all the most primal paranoia there are instances of what appear to be sincere kindness, surprising consideration and very contradictory (almost shocking) thoughtfulness to thank someone... a stranger, to apologize for calling someone so late... thanking people for their cordial nature, knowing their boundaries...when his spiralling out of control clearly had no regard for any

of his own... This is someone that paid the closest attention to details as if everything was under a microscope, even though it looked like he was lost in floundering anonymity...usurped, hijacked by his own paranoia/fiction. But psychopaths exude a charm that is their most attractive, personal weapon... a spellbinding net cast over those they prey on... even if they only harm/trap you with their delusional narratives...?



It scared me... it seriously scared me... His charisma is extremely charming and yet the biggest fear I had was that there wasn't anything tangible to hang onto. As if one is in complete and utter, endless freefall... falling mercilessly into the infinite chasm of someone's cavernous (sacrilegious, demonized) cathedral/abyss where once upon a time a soul resided? Not knowing what's real or wanting fiction to become reality because that's the only thing/place and space that soothes you from the pain, fear and complexity of what is your life's circumstantial 'reality'. I wasn't surprised when McAfee gleefully boasted that people referred to him as the Joker... taking into account his forever-chameleonic ability to turn the trick on/against the trickster...

As the character says about ordinary people in Christopher Nolan's **The Dark Knight**, "*They're only as good as the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When the chips are down, these, these civilized people, they'll eat each other. See, I'm not a monster. I'm just ahead of the curve.*" McAfee had (has?) a way of making you constantly second guess, doubt yourself... so you unknowingly surrender to his authority/dominion.

The suffocation watching this documentary is real. It's as if you're listening to someone that has all the money in the world that pulls/controls each and every string, thread that weaves the matrix/fabric of 'reality' the way human-kind perceives it to be. It's a power pretty close to that of a malevolent god...or a benevolent demon. Which was McAfee?... I'm still not sure... and that constant obscurity, indecisiveness, removal of all cerebral tangibility, and grounding is very disturbing. But he was a master at using his 'brand'. He loved hearing himself say his name. He loved the sound of his name, which is often the case with celebrities who teeter on the brink of being sociopaths. In McAfee's case, a psychopath, at least definitely in the latter years of his life.

It's monumentally ironic to witness how the 'God of antivirus software' that kept the entire world 'safe', ultimately couldn't escape the virus of his own human condition. It's a journey into Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*... what can happen when excess corrupts and usurps your brain chemistry with all the alcohol and drugs in the world that then induce mental illness(es) that make you start believing your own lies... And then you start to create this larger-than-life (fictional?) person that becomes your manifest reality, and it keeps spiralling, voraciously feeding off... and feeding back into itself? It made me think of Marlon Brando's character Kurtz in **Apocalypse Now** that represents the archetypal evil genius. Those scenes and the way McAfee's 'adventure' unfolded, before his escape from Belize, journeying into the heart of the jungle to immerse himself into a realm that only unfolds upon Darwin's principal law, while leaving/rejecting all those society is based and functions on... could not have been more perfectly production designed. The only way 'out', is 'in'... journeying through the network of foliage and forestry (internal jungle) that constitutes our internal landscape... in reciprocation to the external, manifested landscape/reality.

I loved the reversed shot towards the very end of the 'oscillation of waves...narratives'; advancing... depositing remnants, layers on the shore, while receding, corrupting what it takes back into the ocean... a multitude of lies, deception. The entire image is reversed, completely jolting your conventional compass, reversing your entire perspectival gravity and orientation... turning the trick against/ on the trickster and turning the inside out and the upside down... quite semiologically emblematic of





McAfee's masterful manipulation of narratives, psychology and perspective. Who is to know if he really did die, or whether he indeed staged it to escape his history. To escape the caricature that he had spun of his own identity; to escape himself... to escape the surroundings that made him the "brand"/sound bite... "I'm John McAfee"... and free himself into and reinvent himself through anonymity someplace else (like the crab)... Freed from the prison of all the world's top secrets/shell of criteria that encapsulated him.

I also found his tattoos on his back and shoulders interesting. They looked like stripes from a tiger, but the contours looked like they could once upon a time (in another dimensional trajectory of his life IF things had turned out differently with his father) very well have been the wings that exteriorized the 'possible angelic' in him. But life had those atrophy and all too soon they got singed and what was left encrusted (turned the trick on the trickster) and from 'freeing wings' they transformed into suffocating cage bars... remnants of an iron maiden cage that imprisoned his 'being' over his shoulders.

The success and the power to have the 'key' to the world's biggest, most well-kept secrets – even if they demand execution, assassination to keep the secrets. And then to consider the flip side of that power, becoming the hunted



of those whose secrets you access and can use against them. But then, there is a part of me that silently roots for McAfee, hoping even in his darkest of spaces and places in his life, that the flickering remnant, barely burning ember of the angelic in him, trumped, extinguished, swallowed by the monopolizing demon(s) – like Dexter – would turn evil on itself (become the Devil's bride so he could win God's cause)... so he could reinstate himself back into the light, peace, silence... and

absolute anonymity. But I think that is the wishful romantic in me. McAfee's irreversible damage stems from his Dark Father... and the curse he transferred onto himself, removed from his father and (mis)appropriated onto himself. As Joseph Campbell's teachings enlighten: "...and where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves..." When you kill your enemy, you remove the mask of evil they wore previously and place it now over your own face... completely swallowed by the consequences of your actions.

The most horrific image (for me) was seeing McAfee wearing the mask and hearing his voice: – an aspiration for healing alchemy or a malevolent masquerade? You clearly see it's a mask, but somehow it feels even more horrific because you realize the mask/fiction might have more truth to it than the actual person behind it. And that when he does remove it and we see his real face, we continue to feel like the ground has been ripped out from beneath our feet. When he's in the salon trying on wigs, why would he have the salon ladies take selfies with him and then explicitly tell them not to post them on social media/Twitter if you're otherwise not creating some crazy psychopathic circus of fiction? If you truly don't want to be caught or don't



want to intentionally weave this wake of 'legalized-criminality', then you don't leave nuggets of recourse along the way. Or if you do, then perhaps it's because it's symptomatic of just how pathologically above everything you might think you are, or your mental illness has you conned into believing? What is the point of having all the money in the world...when all it does is drive you to win the world...and lose yourself. Or otherwise expressed as: you gain the whole world, but lose your soul.

*Just an aside, **Running with the Devil** was edited by one of our own, Joby Gee. Thanks, Ferg.*

One of the many things I found fascinating, was that ultimately I felt this wasn't a documentary about only McAfee, but about an even greater protagonist that is forever elusive and omnipresent... the 'human condition' that resides in us all. And perhaps that is what makes me understand that while I usually love to switch off all the lights in the room, enter the lull and hypnosis of a visual storytelling experience, this time, I made sure to keep all the lights on. ...Keeping my candle lit as I journeyed into the heart of (human) darkness. The process of gaslighting is comparable to tracking an evil seed that rises from within the victim, unleashed/magnetized by the abuser, but without any recourse holding the abuser accountable because all the 'doing/undermining' is being executed by the victim him/herself. The irony of gaslighters is that while they think they grab the goods and run, get away with it all completely absolved of any wrongdoing, each time they gaslight someone, drops of gas fall back on them, until one fine day it all collects into one insurmountable, near-inconceivable kaboom!

In terms of a genius mogul gone "eccentric" (aka falling off the deep end) there are some similarities with Howard Hughes (who once owned the Hollywood Hills). His fortune 'afforded' him the "luxury" (his simultaneous blessing and curse) to enable, perpetuate his extreme OCD condition in addition to his extreme paranoia, mental illness(es) that made him appear like an individual who had lost perspective and



fallen off the deep end into eccentricity – when all along it was his wealth that kept him out of the sanatorium in which he should have been hospitalized. But society is as much to blame that fans fire into these celebrities and public personas, as the individuals themselves. What is it about society, convention, the 'institutionalized warped malaise' of wealth and 'perceived success' that feeds and fuels the seed of evil-doing, madness and pathology in the 'mortal god(s)' society worships... building them up and tearing them down on a timeline that is dependent, driven and fuelled by mass following, sales of stories...notoriety? Mortal deification never lasts. To be human is to fall from grace in varying, different degrees... fly too close to the sun and your wings melt... Who is to truly blame in such a scenario: the drug user or the drug pusher... and who plays the role of whom? And again...when does the situation, perspectival divide pivot?

I've already seen reports that McAfee's family is blindsided by the documentary. I'm not surprised. Relatives' understandings are highly subjective. When we love someone, when we have memories of a loved-one or someone we were close to at some point... emotions can cloud our judgment and then we can't see what we don't want to see. And if he was generous to them as a result of his financial success, then their gratitude would most certainly skew their perception. Emotions can usurp in the best... and worst way. And quite literally, as I complete this review... the McAfee window prompt jumps up on my laptop... Hilarious... or maybe not? McAfee is embedded within the matrix of engineered and perceived 'reality'... forever supervising and presiding over all communications.



MAKING THE LEAP

Moving from Assistant to Editor

by

Jack Brown

Now more than ever, the pathway to becoming an editor of scripted TV and Film varies wildly from one individual to another. I've seen editors get noticed from a particular short film project they cut and get paid jobs from there. Others cutting commercial jobs for a few years as they develop contacts in order to shift into narrative. As well as the classic approach of being an assistant first.

This last pathway of being an assistant editor as a stepping stone towards being an editor was once upon a time, the default way forward to editing. You'd be working side by side with your editor, absorbing their skills as well as observing their interactions with directors and producers. During this time you'd also be making yourself known to those in power, showing off your skills and enthusiasm, so that when the day came that they need an editor for a project they'd know you are a solid option and one they would inevitably end up turning to.

Now this all sounded great to me back in 2012 when I was in my last year of my film degree and looking towards a bright and colourful future in filmmaking (I was at this time so naïve that I hadn't even developed my coffee addiction yet or my taste for dark and dingy edit suites). I had just finished doing a paper on American editor Sam O'Steen (editor of amazing films such as **The Graduate** [1967] and **Chinatown** [1974]) and was both charmed and fascinated at reading how he had got into the craft in the book *Cut to the Chase* by Bobbie O'Steen. The book is a truly great read that gives an invaluable look into the life of an editor, their trials and tribulations as well as how they think. The section that really took my interest however describes how Sam first got into editing. You see during that time, especially in Hollywood, it was the norm to remain an assistant for eight years before being considered for the role of an editor. Even to the point that when Sam's editor had to urgently leave a feature film project and Sam stepped up to cut the film, he could not be credited as an editor. Rules were rules. See the below quote from the book for Sam's reaction when he was asked to edit a picture when he was still an assistant;

"Jesus I only had four years in as an assistant and I needed eight years [the union rules required eight years of assisting before you could become an editor], so I said "I'm not ready yet, the union won't let me."

The idea was that having that eight year grounding time as an assistant would give you both the skills and experience required so that as soon as you were eligible to be an editor, you'd already be very comfortable and familiar in the cutting room, be on the radar of a number of directors and producers and have the confidence to get in and deliver for the production. Plus, this didn't mean you couldn't do any cutting. Just listen to this story from when he was assisting on **Ice Palace** [1960] with editor, William H. Ziegler.

"Ziggie got sick when we were in the middle of the shoot, and I kept stacking up the film. So I thought "I know what, I'll cut it." So I cut it, cut, cut, cut. Then Ziggie came back after about a week and said "Oh, Jesus Christ, I've got so fucking much work to do, just give me anything," I said, "I already cut it, it's up there [on the bench]." He said "Can I run it?" So he ran it and said, "What else you wanna cut?" And he gave me sequences throughout the picture."

Now you may wonder why I'm banging on about the experiences of an assistant editor back in the 1960s! This being more than sixty years ago, you'd be forgiven for querying it's relevance today, especially the notion of having to slog through eight years as an assistant before being even considered for a chance to cut. But you see it's exactly that outdated pathway that I feel like we are missing today!

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating that everyone who wants to be an editor be forced into assisting for a solid eight years before we can give them a shot. Not at all! Everyone learns the skills and experience and different speeds and while that time may be great for some, others are ready much, much sooner! What I crave about this system of the past, was the efficient and promised reward at the end of the tunnel. The idea that after doing your eight years as an assistant you *will* be given a chance to cut high end projects. Just that, a *chance*. It gives you a promised goal to shoot for and progress in the industry, real tangible hope and with it, great motivation. A surety that the freelancers of today just don't have. In fact these days you could stay as an assistant for quite some time, be fully experienced, done lots of assembling and cutting in other projects but the way forward to being an editor is still pretty muddy.

Now it really isn't hard to figure out why this is or when the change occurred. Like most of the major changes that have come to the craft of film editing, it all began in the 1990s with the major uptake of digital NLE systems over actual film editing on devices like a Steenbeck or Moviola. Suddenly real film bins became a clickable icon, reels became scrubbable sequences and (most importantly to the point) editors and assistants soon had their own editing suites. What was once a shared workspace akin to an apprentice learning first hand from a craftsman, were now two distinct rooms, still a team working together but with their own spaces and assigned tasks and less one-to-one time for the passing down of skills.

It's true that you may still work with your editor closely and see them a lot but assistants these days are more often than not fulfilling an entirely separate role facilitating the demands of the digital age. Sourcing temp music and SFX, doing offline VFX work, offline sound work, managing alpha ingests and titles, maintaining an Avid project, turnovers to sound, colour, VFX and whatever else the digital realm requires.

On top of all that there is also the loss of not being in the same room with the editor during screenings and cuts in order to build relationships with directors and producers, directly building bridges with those who can bring you on as an editor in future projects, not to mention doing so in an environment where they will associate you with that very task. I'd like to remind you all at this point that while the modern age has somewhat warped the assistant to editor pathway, there are of course still clear steps you can take on your glorious road to cutting:

- If you've assisted for an editor multiple times and have established a good relationship with them then they may be your advocate and suggest you as an editor for other projects
- if you've managed to make relationships with directors or producers on jobs and made an impression then they could potentially get you cutting work on their upcoming projects
- You may work on a series that promotes its assistants upward over time
- You can look for 'Junior editor' roles that can serve as a mid way point in order to get editing credits needed to pitch for larger work (though be wary of these and value your time!)



- Build up a portfolio. Whether it be short films or 48 Hour projects, if you have something to show when you get your chance then you'll be better positioned to take on the role.

- Just cut! Whenever you have time as an assistant, play with the footage, cut it together and even offer to help the editor with assembling if there's a lot of rushes. It will be noticed and if you do it well, it will be remembered.

Now you may be wondering if at this point my goal is actually to deter you from taking the assistant route to getting into editing, that it's my mission to convince you it is now obsolete and no longer functions. It is in fact, quite the opposite. I myself worked as an assistant editor in all kinds of various roles and projects from 2013 through to 2020 (when I started to refocus towards editing) and even started a dedicated YouTube channel on the craft of assisting.

After all, the Industry may have moved forward and adapted to the times in many ways with new technologies, formats and jobs in the industry (some that didn't exist even twenty years ago!) However, two things that never seem to change or go out of style (no matter the industry) are:

- Hard work (going the extra mile or two)
- Knowing the right people

Being an assistant editor has allowed me at least the opportunity to do that. Perhaps not splicing tape side by side with my editor but I have taught myself all kinds of extra skills in order to help on each project which was definitely noticed. And I may not get to work with directors in the room on a regular basis like the days of old either but I do everything I can to make myself known to them (wrap parties, VFX Editing roles, cutting blooper reels, helping assemble). After all, making a great impression can often work out better than the promise of 'a shot' after a set time period. In fact it's what got me my first major editing credit as 'Additional Editor' on **Gun's Akimbo** [2019]!

The results of making an impression don't have to be immediate either. In fact sometimes you can be remembered for your effort and work years down the line. After all, that's what happened to our pal Sam O'Steen, when the very same director that had asked him to cut a picture as an assistant got back in touch after his eight years...

"The day I had my eight years in, the very day, the phone rang and it was Del Daves.. I hadn't talked to him in a long time and he said "You ready now?" I said, "Yeah, I'm ready." "Well," he said, "you got a picture."

Quotes are from *Cut to the Chase* by Bobbie O'Steen.

Jack Brown is an editor and assistant based in Scotland, though works throughout the UK as well as New Zealand where he lived from 2007 to 2020. He also runs a YouTube channel called *The Avid Assistant* where he makes tutorial videos of edit workflows and Avid Media Composer features. You can find him at:

www.jack-edit.com | www.imdb.me/storybeforeall | www.youtube.com/@theavidassistant



PIN MASTER

Gorgeous film-themed pins by Julian Master of OfficialExclusive.com

by
K.O. Dakstock



Steve Hullfish should be well known to all members of BFE. He has carved out a well-deserved reputation as the man who has furthered the craft of editing more than anyone else with his access to editing professionals. His book, *The Art of the Cut*, is essential reading for anyone even slightly interested in the craft of film editing. Steve has graciously allowed this magazine's editor to reprint his work in *First Frame* and for that I am eternally grateful.



The much maligned social media platform Twitter, (pre- and post-Elon Musk's troubled ownership), is seen and regarded as an efficient spreader of trivia and debatable ideology (which is never debated) but every now and again, something pops up on my timeline that makes me effervescently glad to be part of the editing community. When Steve posted a picture of himself with a Steenbeck badge (known in the US as a pin...), I said to myself, "I have to get some of that!" Talk about the perfect gift...



So, in the interest of full disclosure, this page is unapologetic support for a man from Brooklyn whose passion for film has manifested itself in badges (or pins) of everything film related. I was thunderstruck by my emotional response to his wares that celebrate film and film production. I have even suggested ideas (the Italian *Incollatrici* film *Joiner*, ubiquitous in cutting rooms of the not too distant past) for further pins from this seriously passionate supporter of what film means to those who really care about the legacy of celluloid. I bought a blimped microphone pin for a great friend of mine, who is a highly regarded production sound mixer. He said it was his best Christmas present and the pin was the envy of all his AMPS (Association of Motion Picture Sound) colleagues.



So, Julian Master of Brooklyn, let me introduce you to our many members who may (I hope) deluge you with orders. Official Exclusive is a website that supports film in a unique way and one I will praise to the rooftops.



"Running Official Exclusive has been a really enjoyable and informative experience so far. It's allowed me to talk to people and engage with a community of film lovers in such an exciting and concrete way. It feels like everyday I wake up to emails in my inbox of people suggesting fun design ideas for film pins. If you have any design ideas, please let me know!"

Julian@OfficialExclusive.com

I'm extremely grateful to all the people who make up the film photography community as they are extremely supportive of my film oriented projects."



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR
2023 WINNERS AT THE
BFE CUT ABOVE AWARDS!



Hosted by Raphael Rowe

BEST EDITED SINGLE DOCUMENTARY OR
NON-FICTION PROGRAMME
Brett Morgen for *Moonage Daydream*

BEST EDITED SINGLE DRAMA
Paul Rogers for *Everything Everywhere All At
Once*

BEST EDITED SINGLE ANIMATION
Holly Klein and Ken Schretzmann, ACE for
Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio

BEST EDITED SERIES: DRAMA
Adam Epstein, ACE and **Joanna Naugle** for *The
Bear*

BEST EDITED SERIES: DOCUMENTARY OR
NON-FICTION
Ben Brown for *Jimmy Savile: A British Horror
Story*



CHRIS CROOKALL AWARD FOR
BREAKTHROUGH EDITOR
Fiona Starogardzki ISE



BEST EDITED SERIES: ANIMATION
**Kirk Baxter, ACE, Julian Clarke, Dave Conte, Matt
Mariska, Jim May, Alberto Mielgo, Stephen Mulhol-
land BFE, ISE, Tyler Nelson, Sabrina Pitre CCE,
Todd Raleigh and Hiroaki Sasa** for *Love, Death +
Robots – Season 3*

BEST EDITED SERIES: COMEDY
Lucien Clayton and Nigel Williams BFE for *Derry
Girls* Season 3

BEST EDITED CURRENT AFFAIRS
Maya Daisy Hawke and Langdon Page for *Navalny*

BEST EDITED BRITISH DRAMA
Mikkel E G Nielsen, ACE BFE for *The Banshees of
Inisherin*

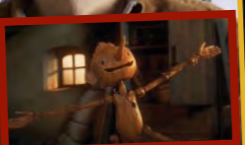
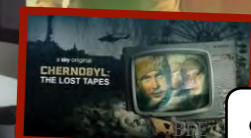
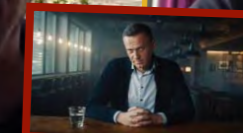
BEST EDITED BRITISH DOCUMENTARY OR
NON-FICTION PROGRAMME
Rupert Houseman for *Chernobyl: The Lost Tapes*



MICHAEL JOHNS BFE AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING ASSISTANT EDITOR
Douglas Bunnage Flavell



EDITED BY
SALLY



Editor's Note: And while we're on the subject of awards, let's remember that two of our number had some award success last year:



At the Royal Television Awards Yorkshire, on Friday 7th October 2022, writer/director Kay Mellor's series *The Syndicate Series 4* won Best Drama. Kay, of course, was one of our guest presenters at our inaugural **Cut Above Awards** ceremony last year. But this win was bittersweet. Sadly, Kay died in May 2022 but the work she leaves behind is a significant testament to her talent and her legacy is assured. Kay's daughter Yvonne did her – and the BFE – proud accepting the award on behalf of her mother. Like actress Lupita Nyong'o at the Oscars in 2014, Yvonne not only praised the writer/director's considerable talent and contribution to the series, she also mentioned the editor of the final episode, our very own Lindsey Dillon-Massey BFE. Lindsey's experience on the series was unfailingly positive, as director Kay gave her the space and opportunity to bring all of her creativity to the table and not just play a technical role. That's the way a director/editor collaboration should be and it's wonderful that it's been recognised. Congratulations, Lindsey!



On the 9th October, the 2022 BAFTA Cymru Award winners were announced and we're delighted to report that one of our own, Elen Pierce Lewis BFE, came away with the prestigious Best Fiction Editor award for her work on the Sky drama *Landscapers*, a SISTER production in association with South of the River Pictures and Sky Atlantic. Huge congratulations, Elen.



I reached out to both Hayden Hillier-Smith and Jordan Orme (or those running their podcast) in October 2022. I wanted their OK to publish the following. I didn't hear back but felt strongly that it was definitely great *First Frame* content. I could say I'm just quoting them (fair use) but I never like publishing anything without specific permission. So please accept this plug for your podcast as a small price I'm paying to list the following:

Things we wish we knew about editing 5 years ago...

1. Good editing puts story first. It's tempting, when you are first starting, to throw every single editing party trick into an edit and make it all about how GOATED* you are as an editor...but those editing party tricks can distract from the actual story.
2. Be nice. Many people would rather work with a greener editor who is nice, than with an experienced editor who treats people like sh*t. Editing can get heated, especially with warring opinions in the edit suite. A good editor is one who is nice even during the hard parts.
3. Murder your Darlings. Newer editors will often leave a shot in because it was cinematically pretty or because it cost a lot of money to make. However, if that shot isn't serving the story, it has to go. Be brutal. Be the Queen of Death.
4. It doesn't matter what you cut on. A great chef can make a fantastic meal no matter the frying pan, and a great editor can make a fantastic edit no matter the software. Pick whatever software you can afford and makes you feel good to cut on and get good at it.
5. The editing community is one of the best subcultures to be a part of. In an industry that can eat people alive, editors are often still humble, friendly, & supportive. We honestly wish we had reached out to other editors sooner. You all are lovely!

* Nope, me neither. <https://www.youtube.com/@EditingPodcast/about>

Editor's Note: And this from Ben Mills...

I've just setup a Discord Server for Film and TV Editorial folks.

It's essentially a server with various chat channels based on different aspects surrounding editing. It's free to join and a good way for people to talk shop outside of the clutter of Facebook and Twitter. I plan to grow it to be a great resource for editors, assistants, trainees, VFX editors to talk shop, socialise and share tips, tricks, ask for help, post jobs and more! Over 24 hours it's grown to have nearly 200 members.

The link to join is here: <https://discord.gg/Y7E2HXhacu>

It'd be great if this could be sent out in the next mailing list or included in the next *First Frame* if that's possible at all?

Editor's Note: Possible and good luck with it, Ben. The next from Andrew McKee and the Manchester Post Production Meet Up on the 9th February 2023

It went brilliantly. All 60 tickets went and I reckon somewhere between 40 & 50 showed up on the night. There was definitely a hunger for something like this up here so we're thinking about how to make it a regular thing every quarter or something. We were pushing the limits of the room so might have to find a bigger venue next time. Thanks so much for your help, posting it in the newsletter. Imagined a dozen people in a corner in a pub when we first thought of this so I'm really chuffed.



Editor's Note: And the last word from this issue's guest contributor, Roger Nygard;

"Included in an editor's skill set is being able to get along with people. Joe Corn looks at it this way: "You are not going to be inspiring anybody if they want to get away from you. I've known a lot of skilled editors who have unappealing personality quirks and they never made it because they couldn't work well in the room." You have to perceive what role they want you to play. Some want you to opine and some want you just to push the buttons - one is more fun than the other. Alec Berg said: "Nobody wants a chatty editor. It's not a cocktail party. You're there to work. Embrace the editorial doctrine "I will shut the fuck up.""



BRITISH FILM EDITORS
CUT ABOVE AWARDS
 2023



STREAM LIVE ONLINE
 FRIDAY 24TH FEBRUARY | 8PM GMT
 [Photography by Daisy Wingate-Sau]

salon Adobe

HIRE WORKS gmpm UNIVERSAL BamMusic TELEVISUAL NO SILENT REVIEWS

