EDITORS ASSEMBLE: CUTTING HAWKEYE AS A COLLABORATIVE TEAM

By **Michael Burns** | 26 April 2022

With three directors and crushing deadlines to contend with on Marvel's limited series about heroic archers, as well as a pandemic to boot, how did the three editors on Hawkeye manage to tell such an enthralling, cohesive story?

Part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) produced by Marvel Studios, Hawkeye takes place after the events of the film *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) and sees Jeremy Renner reprise his role as Clint Barton from the film series, with Hailee Steinfeld joining him as Kate Bishop.

The limited series saw executive producer Rhys Thomas also direct three episodes, while the remaining three were directed by the writing/directing

Hawkeye Premiere, three editors: (L-r) Rosanne Tan, Terel Gibson and Tim Roche

team Bert and Bertie (Amber Templemore-Finlayson and Katie Ellwood). In addition, three editors (Terel Gibson, Rosanne Tan and Tim Roche) took on two episodes each. Filming began in early December 2020 in New York City, with Eric Steelberg and James Whitaker serving as cinematographers, and continued on and off until April 2021.

You'd think that the multiple hands on the story and dealing with interruption and restrictions due to the pandemic would adversely impact a cohesive narrative and feel. However, according to Roche (WandaVision, Curb Your Enthusiasm, It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia), there was a lot of collaboration on the editing floor of the Frank G. Wells Building in Disney's Burbank Studio lot. Rooms on the floor above Marvel were specially – and spaciously, given social distancing concerns – kitted out as suites for the team.

"Specifically for ADR, I don't know how we would have done this if we had to do it the old school way, being in a studio with a lot of different actors across a lot of different time zones," Terel Gibson

"Rosie, Terrel and I were the only people at Disney [at the time], all on the same floor, working together, just talking about things all the time," he explains. "We weren't ever confused about what was going on because we were constantly in on each other's episodes."

Hawkeye

"We were always together," agrees Tan (*The Falcon* and *The Winter Soldier*, *Mr. Robot, Homecoming*). "The episodes aren't shot one by one - they're actually cross-boarded [multiple episodes shot at once]. The two sets of directors were shooting all six episodes throughout. We'd send things to the directors, but I would show Tim and Terel first. In the beginning, we were doing it remotely, but after, with the closeness of just walking in and showing each other our sequences, we had great feedback."

"We had different directing teams; Tim and I worked with Rhys Thomas," says Gibson (*Sorry to Bother You, Ready or Not, The Fighter*). "I worked on the first couple of episodes, and Rosie exclusively had Bert & Bertie. From day one of shooting, we were constantly throwing stuff back and forth, comparing and contrasting and just making sure we were all rowing in the same direction."

Cutting at speed

Hawkeye was cut on Avid Media Composer, but it wasn't just for postproduction; the editors were cutting from day one of shooting. There were night shoots among the constant stream of dailies, so the editors could be waiting until late afternoon to get their hands on content.

"We were cutting every day," says Tan. "Sometimes it's necessary for the directors to see what's going on so that they can shoot something else on the same day or the same set.

"Sometimes you've finished cutting one part of an action sequence and the second unit of it comes in. While you're cutting that in, you're also doing post-viz so that [The Third Floor, which worked on *Hawkeye*] can do their part and fill in the blue screens, add the arrows and all the special effects, so that you can get a sense for the review screenings, to make sure that works [before it gets handed over to VFX]. Deadlines are ongoing throughout, from beginning to end."

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Tan appears to have used the non-consecutive shoots and change of direction - cutting more emotional scenes of revelations around Maya contrasted with a car chase - as a sort of palette-cleanser, editorially speaking.

The MCU is notable for not always taking itself too seriously, and there are a lot of comic elements in *Hawkeye*, as well as darker tones. The editors say it's crucial to keep it balanced though. "We would always sacrifice a laugh for character development and story," Gibson notes.

Maya Lopez - Hawkeye

The editors were also in charge of keeping the pace on track.
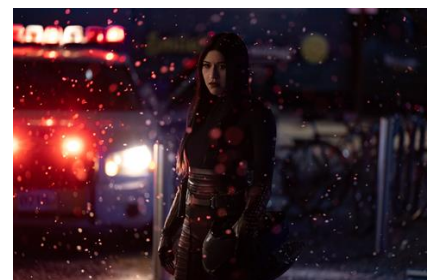
"In a general overall dramatic arc, the first few episodes tend to have a little less pace," says Roche. "Things are all spread out, you're getting to know people, and then you want to accelerate towards the end. I feel episode three is nicely balanced, where you have a crazy action set-piece and then you just really get to take it down and sit with the characters a little bit. Conversely, it works in the opposite [direction] with episode four."

Developing character

Hawkeye viewers have to adapt to a new character in the MCU in the shape of Kate Bishop. "I thought it was fun to introduce somebody, particularly a female, into the MCU who wasn't automatically flawless, when we're doing something, structurally, that's unexpected," says Gibson. "The show's called *Hawkeye*, but we're going to spend this first episode with a character you don't know."

Hawkeye - young Maya

Both Kate Bishop and Clint Barton have an "outward armour" that hides a need for self-protection. The editors portray this by choosing specific takes and smart cutting.

"It's all about finding that balance and that calibration, and playing on the importance of what's not being said," says Gibson. "Also Tim and Rosie would sometimes give me a note to say that 'Hailee's a little harsh there, do you have another line reading for that?'."

"There are different ways to work a scene; you won't know until you actually cut it together, and you show it to various people," says Tan. "You [might not have] seen it the way [they do], just because you're so 'in it'."

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Another new introduction is Maya Lopez played by Alaqua Cox who, like the character she portrays, is a deaf person.

"She's such a badass against Cliff and Kate," says Tan. "It was very interesting to see her grow throughout the episodes. Working on American Sign Language was something new for me too, just actually making sure that we show that and be respectful. We also wanted to show the difference between what Maya is going through versus what Clint is going through [Lopez is deaf, while Barton is hard of hearing], with no disrespect."

Audio matters

With Disney owning both Marvel and Lucasfilm, there's access to the "full gamut of Skywalker Sound", according to Gibson, but it's the editors who take on the initial audio workflow.

"For me, I'll cut the scene and then I'll apply sound design in it," says Tan. "We hand over to our assistant editors, they sound design, we go back and forth, and then we add our temp music and everything for presentation. Then it's done with Skywalker, which takes it over and creates [the final mix]."

"We work with our soundscape for 99% of the post-production schedule. We're setting a template that Skywalker is ultimately going to make amazingly better," agrees Gibson. "We have access to the full Skywalker library in the Avid. We can pull from anything that's ever been used on a Marvel show, and all the movies. It's really important to think about the consistency across the Marvel Universe; the grappling hook arrow should still sound the same as it did in the first Avengers movie for example.

Terel Gibson

"Then there are new elements as well, such as Clint's hearing loss and how to represent that, while at the same time not being so subjective that the audience is disengaged," he continues.

Inspired by the film *Sound of Metal*, Gibson and Tan experimented with a muffled 'hands-over-ears' approach to the audio to give the audience a sense of what Barton was experiencing. "Then when you get to Rosie's fantastic scene when Clint's son calls, that's already informed and feels emotional and established rather than just a trick."

Rowdy restaurants and emotional beats

Each of the editors had a scene they recall as particularly challenging to cut. For Gibson, it was the restaurant meal between Barton and his children in episode one. "Dinner scenes are sometimes the most challenging because generally speaking they spend a full day someplace and there's a ton of coverage to go through," says Gibson, who then had to wrangle the sprawling result of a shoot that was apparently akin to 'the Wild West'.

Rosanne Tan
Source: John Benitez Photography

"Terel's scene is just so well done, so organic and it feels natural," says Roche. "It did not feel forced and expository, you get all the information and emotion from it."

Roche spent a lot of time cutting variations of the ending in the final episode. "I would say from the ice rink to the end, I probably had 47 different versions," he reveals. "You wrestle it, swap things out in different places, there are just so many different variables. It was all about pace: you want to leave at the right moment and come back at the right moment."

"Episode three was one of the toughest for me just because there are so many different elements and to keep it going for so long," says Tan. "Not just the car chases, but [the action] inside the KB Toy Store. There are so many different beats there. The trick was to make it flow nicely and keep everybody

still interested in it. Then we start the car chase, there's an explosion and then something else happens. There are tons of VFX throughout, so we were always reviewing it."

Another scene Tan highlights, with nods of respect from Gibson and Roche, is the dialogue between Kate Bishop and assassin Yelena (Florence Pugh) in episode five. It's a change of pace though. "It's just between two people talking and you would think that that's something that would be very easy, it's not," she says. "These two performers were just so great, so it was all about finding what to cut in there. Also, it's 10 minutes, so to keep that interesting with your cutting [is difficult], and you don't want to see the editing, you actually want to see them act."

Sharing the load

Avid's Nexis shared storage allows multiple video editors and assistants to work on the same projects at once.

"We all have access to everything," says Gibson. "We each got two episodes, so they were siloed off. But there's some cross-pollination between episodes as well that you need to be able to [understand]. Where does this episode begin, or where does this one end? So our work would overlap. We were constantly trying things, and nothing is off the table, it didn't matter if it was scripted to be in this particular episode. It's all about finding the best hook to keep the audience engaged and keep them on board for the run of the show."

"We have a schedule of which shots need to go to the VFX vendors at some point," says Roche. "You constantly have targets you have to hit and it becomes like triage, what's the thing that we have to do right now? I don't know how many times I had to kick music meetings down a week because I had to get visual effects shots ready."

"We all had great support," says Tan. "We were all given first assistant editors, second assistant editors and our own VFX editors to handle that triage process. So every day we were trying to make sure that we hit the notes, we'd talk to our team, and then we'd go from there, but we also had to make sure that the things that we've kept in the air were still ongoing."
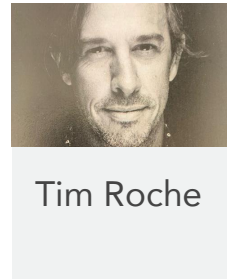
Tim Roche

With the pandemic initially forcing meetings onto Zoom and reviews onto ClearView Flex, the editors also had to learn how to work remotely. Media Composer integrates with MediaCentral, enabling teams to connect and access content locally and remotely, while editors, assistants, showrunners and producers can connect and collaborate from anywhere over Nexis.

"You can now just be back-to-back with each VFX or ADR meeting, supervising the mix from the comfort of your laptop versus having to go all across town," says Gibson. "Specifically for ADR, I don't know how we would have done this if we had to do it the old school way, being in a studio with a lot of different actors across a lot of different time zones."

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