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[KICK-ASS 2](#)

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By Saleem Aziz

A handshake between two superheroes on top of a roof amidst the sunrise—a new friendship is formed. “A world full of superheroes, huh? As a great man once said, ‘Wait till they get a load of me.’” Suddenly, there is a gunshot and a quick flash of white. That’s the ending to the first *Kick-Ass* movie. This August Kick-Ass and Hit-Girl return with new friends, forming the rag-tag group Justice Forever, and take on Red Mist reborn as The Mother F%&\*^r and his army of villains in *Kick-Ass 2*. The Mother F%&\*^r is bent on revenge since Kick-Ass killed his father and has set out to make Kick-Ass and Hit-Girl pay. However, before you see this “kickassery” unfold in theaters this summer, take a journey with me to the “Kick-Ass-A-Torium” where editor Eddie Hamilton, A.C.E., and writer/director Jeff Wadlow talk about their own superhero journey to finish the film.

The passion shared between our superheroes in the film can also be found in our superheroes in the cutting room. In fact, their superhero backstories share similarities and if it were a script this could be the opening scene:

EXT. HOUSE IN SMALL NEIGHBORHOOD – DAY

TEXT ON SCREEN: WEST SUSSEX, ENGLAND

SLOW DOLLY TOWARD HOUSE.

MALE V.O.

Superheroes do live among us.

(pause)

A small percentage of us are born with a special ability, but very few of us know about them.

CAMERA ENTERS THE WINDOW OF THE HOME.

INT. EDDIE'S HOME – DAY

We see EDDIE HAMILTON at age seven walking down the steps. He walks into the living room and puts in a Betamax tape and presses play.

MALE V.O.

Sometimes we have to meet the right person for it to switch on.  
Eddie switches on the TV. The last hour of Star Wars is playing.

CUT TO:

Eddie's eyes.

We can see the images of the movie being reflected off them.

ZOOM INTO EDDIE'S EYE.

TEXT ON SCREEN: NORTHERN VIRGINIA

EXT. MOVIE THEATER – EVENING

PAN DOWN.

The marquee reads Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

JEFF WADLOW age four is walking out of the theater with his father, holding his hand. Jeff looks up to his father with intrigue and ambition in his eyes.

JEFF WADLOW

So what does a director do exactly?

Although Hamilton and Wadlow would share the same passion and love for filmmaking, they wouldn't have formed the bond they currently have until they met each other almost two years ago in Los Angeles. Wadlow, an up-and-coming writer/director, *Cry\_Wolf* and *Never Back Down*, wrote the screenplay to *Kick-Ass 2*. He sent it to Matthew Vaughn, writer and director of the first film, and he loved it. Vaughn then set in motion the meeting of our two superheroes. Vaughn suggested that Wadlow meet Hamilton who was currently in Los Angeles. The meeting went so well, Hamilton became the first person hired by Wadlow on the film. Their impressions of each other after the meeting were almost uncanny. If you spoke to them separately about how the meeting went they would both say the same thing: "I have great respect for him. He loves storytelling. He's very passionate. He's so talented at what he does." Almost like a rehearsed alibi, except you can't pay for this kind of genuine trust and honesty this editor and director have for one another.

*Star Wars* got Hamilton thinking about pursuing a career in the film industry. He had to watch *Star Wars* on TV because his parents weren't into films that much, so they didn't really take him to the cinema. Ten years after watching that iconic movie Hamilton started to cut together scenes from movies that he liked by connecting two VHS machines together. One of those movies was *Aliens* and he used

that film's footage to create montages with the training music from *Rocky IV*. He continued his learning in college then ended up getting a job as a runner at a post-production facility in central London. It was there he taught himself how to use Avid Media Composer every weeknight and weekend. He got a break editing his first feature in 1996. The film was so low budget that he did it for free and supported himself by working two days a week at the Paramount Comedy Channel. Hamilton never assisted on films as an editor in the British Guerilla Films world—he was his own assistant. “On my first 10 features there was no budget for an assistant editor. I was my own assistant—digitizing, synching rushes, logging paperwork, cutting the film, doing playouts, creating EDLs [edit decision lists] and generally overseeing the entire post on the movie. That is how I learned my craft.”



Chloë Grace Moretz. Photo by Daniel Smith. ©2013 Universal Studios. All rights reserved.

Wadlow graduated from Dartmouth College where he did his undergraduate studies in history and film. Before doing any more schooling he took a year off where he became a PA and a personal assistant to Pierce Brosnan until he applied to USC's Peter Stark Producing Program, from which he graduated in 2001. In 2002, Wadlow won the Chrysler Million Dollar Film Competition, which he explains was a seven-month extreme course for directors, and got a million dollars to make his first film *Cry\_Wolf*. Wadlow went on to direct *Never Back Down* then switched gears back to writing due to the recession at the time. He sold some TV shows and spec'd a script called *Bloodshot* based off a 1990s comic book. Vaughn heard the pitch and read the script, then began talking with Wadlow and asked if he would like to write and direct *Kick-Ass 2*. Wadlow said yes and began writing the first draft for the sequel, which he finished in six weeks.

Once production on the movie began Hamilton was cutting almost immediately, because footage was ready for him the day it was shot. Filmed on the ARRI ALEXA camera, they had six 512GB solid-state drives that would go back and forth between set and post. Equipped with two DaVinci Resolve workstations purchased from 1 Beyond, the editorial team handled the backing up of all the raw files to the internal RAID on the systems, then on to LTO-5 tapes and bare 3TB SATA hard drives. They also used the stations to transcode the LogC ARRIRAW files to Rec709 Avid DNxHD36 MXF files and copied them onto the Unity for editing. This process was handled by Hamilton's first assistant editors Ben Mills and Riccardo Bacigalupo and editorial trainee Erline O'Donovan. Crucial with helping this workflow run smoothly, they also sync'd the footage in Avid and made 720p dailies into QuickTimes for iPads and PIX for studio use.



Editor Eddie Hamilton, A.C.E. Photo by Hugh MacDonald

“Eddie designed this workflow where we didn’t even have a lab.” Wadlow raves about this workflow because it became an important part of the filmmaking process. Hamilton and his team processed all the data and checked all the footage. This process allowed Hamilton to become another set of eyes for Wadlow in the storytelling process. “He went through every take and every shot. If I was missing something [...] he was able to call me and say, ‘Hey you missed this moment or angle or I think you’re going to need this shot.’” Hamilton would also color correct in Media Composer to make sure the footage had the visual look the director of photography was after. His team also conformed the entire movie at 2k on a DaVinci Resolve timeline before handing it over to the DI (digital intermediate) facility. This entire workflow saved production hundreds of thousands of dollars.

However, that’s not the end of Hamilton’s P90X workflow. His approach to cutting a scene is very rigorous, yet effective. “I don’t know how many other editors do this, but it works for me. I don’t watch all the dailies before I start editing. I will watch one wide shot to get a sense of the pace and the feel of the scene and [then] I’ll start cutting the scene. I’ll throw the scene together very quickly in half an hour.” He feels this method allows him to quickly start seeing the shape of the scene and to also see its strengths and weaknesses. When he eventually watches all the dailies he has a good idea of what he is actually looking for, as well as getting a sense of how the actors are developing throughout the different shots. He also pulls selects of all the best stuff he sees and by the end he has a very long arsenal of selections that he then uses to fine cut the scene he just assembled.



Writer/Director Jeff Wadlow. Photo by Sam Tipper-Hale.

This pace worked well for Wadlow, especially while he was still directing the film and could only make it to the cutting room when he had time. “Making a movie is tough! Making a movie on a limited budget is even tougher! And trying to make a sequel for less money than the original, but do more—it’s got to be the toughest job I’ve ever had!” Wadlow would sometimes visit post after the day was over to look at dailies and scenes Hamilton had assembled. These sessions helped him out greatly because he would get nervous about the compromises he would have to make due to budget constraints, but after seeing what Hamilton put together it set him more at ease. “I would go and see Eddie and he would show me the footage he cut together and I would always walk out of editorial feeling like a million bucks. Not just because he is so incredibly talented and the work was so strong but because he was so passionate and enthusiastic about the movie we were making, I couldn’t help but feed off of that.”





Colonel Stars and Stripes (Jim Carrey) and Kick-Ass (Aaron Taylor-Johnson). Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures. ©2013 Universal Studios. All rights reserved.

One of the biggest challenges for Hamilton was going through all the footage. “On some of the bigger scenes Jeff would shoot three cameras and sometimes all three at 48 frames per second.” A lot of footage to go through, but that didn’t deter Hamilton from watching it all. He doesn’t like to skim through footage and in return he feels it allows him to get to the end result quicker. When asked what his favorite moment was cutting the film his response was unexpected and classic. “Editing is the best job. If you think about the filmmaking process, somebody will work a very long time on the screenplay, then a studio will invest millions of dollars into the project and they will employ the best production team, sometimes hundreds of people [...] to make that magic moment between action and cut happen for the camera. Then all that work is sent to one person, the editor, and it all comes down to you to cut the film. So you are the first person on the planet to see the movie come to life [...]—I get a kick out of that every day just realizing that I’m in such a lucky position.”

When Wadlow finished shooting the film he turned all his focus to post. Expecting to come in and help hash out the rough assembly, he was shocked to find that Hamilton had already finished it. “I’ve always been very hands on when it comes to editing and I just assumed that there would be a similar workflow where Eddie would have an assembly, but he probably wouldn’t have completed it and I would sit down on my own Avid and finish it while he refined other scenes. And I was shocked and pleased, that when I finished photography, to find that he finished the whole movie and it was in pretty good shape.” For Wadlow this was a big deal because he was able to let go a little and let his new storyteller, Hamilton, look at it with fresh eyes. “When I was ready to work with him he had made discoveries about the story I hadn’t even thought of yet.”

“Jeff is very editing literate. In fact, on his previous two films, he had his own Media Composer and he would edit quite a lot himself,” Hamilton describes. However, on this film Hamilton saw the footage the way Wadlow was seeing it and would generally cut the scene accordingly. This allowed the director to take it all in and discuss scenes in detail and take more time working them out. “We’ve worked on this film together quite intensely for what will be about six months when it’s all said and done. I’m sure the film is better than it would have been, if I was on my own doing it. He is definitely one of the closest

collaborators I've had in terms of a director." Hamilton credits Wadlow with understanding editing and that being one of the driving forces that led to them collaborating so well.

Prior to that happening, Wadlow jokes that, before post, Hamilton made it clear that his script was great and that all he needed to do during the shoot was stick to it and he would be fine. However, the first day in the cutting room Hamilton said to him, "Okay, it's time to throw out the script." Surprised Wadlow replied, "I thought we liked the script." Hamilton admitted, "Nope. We have to deal with what's been shot. That's all that matters now." It was hard for the writer/director to throw out the script, but having a great storyteller as his editor helped him focus on the footage because that's really all they have in the end. Wadlow's quick embrace of this idea helped them finish the director's cut two weeks ahead of schedule. "At times I was more merciless than Eddie was. He was sort of shocked at the trims I suggested." In no time they got the movie into fighting shape and that was also due in part to the rough assembly being so strong. Most of the scenes from the first assembly stayed as-is and were just made tighter.

At the end of the day, when it's all said and done, Hamilton and Wadlow have shown us what it means to be a Kick-Ass superhero and also the aptitude it takes—a tireless work ethic combined with passion and enthusiasm for what you do. Also, a tremendous amount of respect for each other. "[This] kind of synergy between two people working on a story—the project becomes elevated beyond what a single person could do." That superhero line comes from Wadlow himself.