

## RED HILL

By Cindy Clarkson



*(From left to right) Kelly Sheeran, Dmitri Golovko, Cindy Clarkson, Patrick Hughes and Ben Joss (snapped by Sasha Dylan Bell)*

Play Ennio Morricone spaghetti western music while reading this. Imagine a crossroad disappearing into the heat haze scuffed boots stop in the foreground. After several seconds the boots move a little grinding loose gravel under heel. Go straight you travel the road you are on. Turning left or right results in a shift of consequence. Standing at the crossroad was Patrick Hughes. He'd been making commercials for seven years since graduating from VCA and been trying to get a gig as a feature director. No one was going to give him a feature till he had gone out and made one like Greg Mclean (Wolf Creek) or Clayton Jacobson (Kenny). So Patrick set himself a goal write, produce, direct, edit a genre feature and get it in Sundance or Berlin. It was a eleven month frenetic ride of writing a modern western, finding finance of \$720 000, casting, crewing and arriving at Omeo for a 4 week location shoot by July. As Patrick commented several times it was constant compromise.

Red Hill was shot on 35mm short ends bought in America, shot 2 perf, telecined at Digital Pictures in SD onto mini dv and assembled by Kelly Sheeran on location. It was a family environment where everyone chipped in to make things happen. Patrick had storyboarded the film but like most things time was always marching so he had to be adaptable one example is Cooper coming across the car that had been carrying the escapee as he makes his way back into town. They had ten minutes to cover the scene as the sun set and it was captured in three shots the storyboard thrown out the window.

Ben Joss had heard that Patrick had shot the film so gave him a call offering his services in post and Patrick felt he didn't need it. Four days later he rang Ben and so they began editing on Avid in separate rooms at Patrick's office. When Ben started the film had yet to be completely assembled. So the two set to work resulting in a 2 and a half hour assembly. Patrick confessed to keeping shots too long because he was in love with them. They couldn't drop scenes or characters to reduce time as the story was linear and events (mainly deaths) had to happen in a certain order. So it was about reducing scenes, which was a challenge due to limited coverage. An example shown was the town hall meeting at the beginning of the film where the Sherriff Old Bill (Steve Bisley) delivers an impassioned

speech about the death of the town. Ben showed us the first and the last version which reduced Bisley's rant and demoted the woman calling for progress to a few words and looks. Patrick commented the script goes through three stages of writing: you write the script; you rewrite it as it is shot and then you rewrite it for a third time in the edit.

Having started with just 9 CGI shots for the panther scene it quickly blossomed out to over one hundred. The panther scene was made all the more difficult when they found out that of the two wild cats you could film in the world there was now only one as the wild cat in NZ had been put down because it had attacked and killed its trainer on set. They found themselves in the situation of having to ask Greg McLean to shoot the remaining cat in LA. Ben happily showed the original edited version where Patrick on all fours is acting panther like for timing purposes as he protested while grinning at the footage intercut with Cooper's reaction shots as he watches the "panther" Patrick stalk in and take the recently deceased cop from the barn.

The main reason the CGI blossomed out was due to the final 8 minute sequence of the film where Jimmy (Tommy Lewis) hunts down the remaining men. Patrick knew at the time they hadn't be able to get enough coverage as the main focus on the day was the burning barn of hay bales. While at Omeo they shot missing close ups in a make shift studio set up in a hall knowing they would have to composite the characters into the backgrounds. In cutting the footage together it became apparent they would need to create shots out of the material they had available to them. Ben showed us one example of the many composites of a back plate WMS of the field, add Old Bill on his knees in mid profile shot staring at the ground plus Jimmy's arm just above the elbow joint pointing his gun at the back of Bill's head. At the end of an intensive six week edit 6 -7 day weeks 15 hour days Ben and Patrick had a list of extra shots that they couldn't create. At that stage the edit stopped for two weeks so Patrick could shoot a commercial to finance the pickups in Melbourne.

Time was striding. To hit the deadline of getting the finished film which had been accepted into Berlin the post team knew they didn't have months to get the CGI finished they had weeks. Kelly took on 50 of the CGI shots, which he defined as the easier shots to do, they had set pieces go to three CGI houses and Ben did a call out to a collective of Australia CGI artists. At the time it just so happened some had just come off a couple of big effects film and were willing to help the project. It also meant that there was a broad range of highly skilled specialists so Ben allocated effects required to their strengths, which was of enormous benefit to the film.

Dmitri, the composer, upon reading the script created 10 to 15 minutes of score that was played on set. One example was the introductory scene to Shane Cooper (Ryan Kwanten) and his pregnant wife Alice (Claire van der Boom). Shane is walking through the house call out to Alice as he gets dressed looking for his police issue gun. There is a gentle exchange at the bathroom door so Patrick played the music to the actors on set before they started shooting the

scene to set the mood. Dmitri then worked with the various cuts to score the film but found the constant tweaking of the picture frustrating.

As a parting gift I'll mention Patrick's realisation that although a film shoot is physically taxing editing is mentally wearing. He happily declared he would not cut a feature film that he directed again. I would like to thank Ben Joss who not only organised the guests but also brought along the avid project for us to view, Patrick Hughes for being so upfront about his experience, Kelly Sheen data wrangler/CGI artist, and Dmitri Golovko composer for their generosity to contributing to the evening. The night was a fantastic example of everyone pulling together to make an independent film happen in the timeframe given.

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