**In Conversation - Mortal Kombat Producer E Bennett Walsh\_HOH montage\_AD**

| **TIMECODE** | **SPEAKER** | **CONTENT** |
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| 00:00:04:19 | JACQUI | Well, hello, everyone. I'd like to welcome you all to this webinar interview with E. Bennett Walsh, who's on the Gold Coast, Yugambeh land. I'm currently sitting in Brisbane - Meanjin - on the lands of the Jaggera and the Turrbal peoples, and I'd like to welcome you to this webinar from wherever you're coming from.  As a number of you know, we were meant to be in person at the Gold Coast, but due to the inclement weather that's around and some potentially dangerous roads, we've moved this to online.  Thank you, Bennett, for joining us here today. It's really wonderful to have you join us and share some of the insights from your filming of 'Mortal Kombat 2' most recently on the Gold Coast, which you've just wrapped.  But, I think, to kick off and before we get into interviewing you, I am going to share screen and show a trailer, which I think says so much about your background and the work that you've done, so... Oh! Um... |
| 00:01:15:13 | BENNETT | Well, thank you for having me. Thank you for having me. |
| 00:01:18:09 | JACQUI | And let's hit play. |
| 00:01:21:04 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Text on a black screen: "E. Bennett Walsh, Executive Producer." A series of film clips plays. In 'State of Play', Russell Crowe enters a crime scene. Helen Mirren glares. |
| 00:01:21:05 | RUSSELL CROWE | Start from the beginning. |
| 00:01:22:07 | SFX | (TYRES SCREECH, GUN FIRES) |
| 00:01:24:05 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Crowe hangs from a speeding car. A man shoots at him. |
| 00:01:24:06 | SFX | (SOMBRE MUSIC) |
| 00:01:25:06 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'The Kite Runner', colourful kites soar above a dusty valley in Afghanistan. In town, two boys walk with their arms around each other's shoulders. An Afghani man looks at a Polaroid of a boy. |
| 00:01:27:05 | MAN | Hassan is dead. |
| 00:01:28:06 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Armed men ride in a ute tray.  In 'Disturbia', dark rooms are searched by torchlight. A newspaper headline reads 'Woman Missing'. |
| 00:01:30:10 | SHIA LaBEOUF | I know what I saw. |
| 00:01:32:01 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Shia LaBeouf turns, wide-eyed. A station wagon hits a car and hurtles into the air.  In 'Glitter', stage lights sweep across performers. |
| 00:01:33:11 | MAN | You can't let him use the best of you. |
| 00:01:35:07 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | A packed audience cheers and waves lighters. Mariah Carey stands in the spotlight. |
| 00:01:36:14 | MARIAH CAREY | What makes you think that's the best of me? |
| 00:01:37:24 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'Kill Bill: Volume 1', the blood-soaked Uma Thurman is surrounded by Crazy 88 fighters. |
| 00:01:38:20 | SFX | (BLADES RING, DRAMATIC MUSIC) |
| 00:01:40:01 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | An ornate sword is unsheathed. In a snowy garden, Thurman sword-fights with Lucy Liu. Thurman fights the Crazy 88. Gogo Yubari reveals her spiked mace. Thurman arches her eyebrows. The feet of a bride and groom step toward each other. |
| 00:01:42:04 | VIVICA A. FOX | I suppose it's a little late for an apology. |
| 00:01:44:16 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Thurman glares. Liu draws a blade, then smiles. |
| 00:01:47:02 | UMA THURMAN | You suppose correctly. |
| 00:01:48:18 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Thurman picks up a sword. Daryl Hannah grips a sword then kicks in a door. |
| 00:01:49:21 | SFX | (FLAMES ROAR, CREATURE SNARLS) |
| 00:01:51:08 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'The Great Wall', fireballs are hurled over the wall. A huge burning creature leaps. Matt Damon shoots an arrow. A fiery explosion sends a man flying. Fireballs rain down.  In 'Men in Black: International', Agent M fights an alien. She sits in headquarters. |
| 00:01:55:12 | AGENT M | I want in. |
| 00:01:56:10 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Chris Hemsworth fires a weapon. Agent M puts on sunglasses. A car swerves. Agents shoot huge weapons.  In 2018's 'Robin Hood', Robin shoots a flaming arrow. Running horses pull a cart past a fiery explosion. Robin swings onto a walkway. A dancer swooshes her flowing outfit. Figures fight in the rain. |
| 00:02:02:03 | JAMIE FOXX | You wanted to be the hero. |
| 00:02:04:01 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'The Amazing Spider-Man 2', Spider-Man swings past high-rises and sweeps a woman away from crashing vehicles. People flee as a massive mechanical foot stamps down. An eye of Spider-Man's mask reflects Gwen Stacey's body as she plummets away. Diving, Spider-Man shoots a web. |
| 00:02:05:20 | JAMIE FOXX | You gotta pay the price. |
| 00:02:07:09 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'After Earth', people flee an explosion. In a futuristic room, Will Smith frowns. In a jungle, a baboon watches Jaden Smith. Jaden spins and aims a weapon. He stands on a mountain peak. |
| 00:02:10:01 | JADEN SMITH | What was I supposed to do?! |
| 00:02:11:19 | SFX | (SABRE-TOOTHED CAT SNARLS) |
| 00:02:12:06 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | A huge sabre-toothed cat pounces. Jaden leaps off the peak.  In 'Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance', Ghost Rider's skull head and motorbike wheels emit flames as he speeds along a highway. A thug shoots. Ghost Rider lassos a ute with his chain. Trailing smoke, a vehicle hurtles over Ghost Rider. |
| 00:02:17:11 | SFX | (VEHICLE THUDS, GLASS SHATTERS) |
| 00:02:18:11 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | In 'Stealth', a fighter jet shoots a missile. A massive explosion of flame and smoke sends people and vehicles flying. |
| 00:02:19:11 | MAN | You wanted to be on the cutting edge? |
| 00:02:20:14 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Sleek fighter jets soar above clouds. Two men face off. |
| 00:02:21:21 | MAN | This is it. |
| 00:02:22:21 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | Jets skim over billowing explosions. Jessica Biel yells and shoots. Jets fly through a valley and over buildings.  In 'Kill Bill: Volume 2', a hand thrusts from a grave. Uma Thurman draws a sword. A woman shoots a shotgun. Thurman dodges acrobatically. Light shines through a scattering of buckshot holes. Thurman faces David Carradine. |
| 00:02:25:17 | UMA THURMAN | You and I have unfinished business. |
| 00:02:29:06 | AUDIO DESCRIPTION | The wind blowing through her hair, Thurman winks and grins.  Text on a black screen: "'Men In Black: International', 'The Amazing Spider-Man 2', 'Kill Bill, Vol. 1', 'Kill Bill, Vol. 2', 'Robin Hood' (2018), 'The Great Wall', 'Disturbia', 'Stealth', 'The Kite Runner', 'After Earth', 'Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance', 'State of Play', 'Glitter', 'Turn It Up', 'Enough', 'Boiler Room', 'Too Tired to Die'. E. Bennett Walsh, Executive Producer." |
| 00:02:38:02 | SFX | (DRAMATIC MUSIC FADES) |
| 00:02:42:13 | JACQUI | There we go. Awesome. So wonderful. So let's talk about action. Let's start there. What are the ingredients to producing and making a great action film? Like, you know, clearly, that's your USP, so why are people picking up the phone and saying, "Bennett, we need you"? What is it that...you know, that you bring to that to make a great action film? |
| 00:03:10:18 | BENNETT | Well, I mean, that's a very broad question... |
| 00:03:13:13 | JACQUI | It is a broad question. |
| 00:03:15:03 | BENNETT | You know, it's not... It's not like I started off to make action movies and, you know, I didn't even start off to be a producer, a line producer. I actually wanted to be a cinematographer and my very first job was loading lighting in grip trucks in Boston, Massachusetts, when I was going to Emerson College.  I mean, I think I found my way into producing when I was working in an editorial firm in New York where I was editing toy commercials, and I got into the production business and we all just pitched in. And I sort of fell in love with the production part of making films.  And, you know, I guess...I guess, really, my break was 'Kill Bill', because before that, it was a blend of suspense and I did a lot of independent movies in New York that were all, you know, under $10 million.  And when 'Kill Bill' came along, I had done some overseas experience and they thought I would be able to tackle Asia. I wasn't expecting 'Kill Bill'.  We made it as one movie. Quentin Tarantino decided to split it into two only once we finished shooting. It was 155 days over nine months.  And, you know, I think I just had... You know, the people that were a part of that film... Woo-ping was the fight choreographer who did 'The Matrix' in Sydney and, you know, it was just fantastic because, you know, it was such an epic film and if that movie, you know, was actually one film, it would be his masterpiece, because it was just so incredible.  You know, I understand why he split it in two. He just loved what he got and he didn't want to shorten it, so it was 4.5 hours if you combine the two.  You know, after that, I made my first Australian film, which was 'Stealth' in 2003, and that film probably cemented me into action-adventure and predominantly also overseas.  So to your question, "Why do they call me?" They pretty much call me for the most difficult movies. And, you know, sometimes it's in North America, you know, a lot of times, it's overseas. I've made three films in China. And they give me the tough ones.  So what are the tough movies? The action movies. It's the complexities of all the moving parts and often multiple countries.  And, I think, to go to your second question, is, "What makes for a great action movie?" and it's always challenging because, you know, technology advances...action films advances and we're always trying to top each other, so we're always competing to, you know, what the last cycle of action films were. And the best action is when you can have character development and narrative storytelling during the action sequence.  You can go back 10 years, you can go back 15 years, and if you look at some great action movies, you'll see how sometimes character development and narrative storytelling stops.  And we always try to infuse character development and, you know, story at the same time because then there's something the audience can grip to. Enjoy the action, but, also, we're propelling the narrative and further developing it because, you know, a movie's 2-2.5 hours and we're always struggling to get everything in, because, you know, you go beyond that and it's hard to sustain, you know, releasing the film. So I think...I think that's really what makes great action. |
| 00:07:31:05 | JACQUI | And I was gonna ask you about your break in the industry, which you've just sort of encapsulated, but I suppose maybe you could talk a little bit about that first break into 'Kill Bill'. How did you go from all that work that you were doing on commercials and grips trucks and lighting and interest in cinematography? What... How did you get that break onto 'Kill Bill'? |
| 00:07:54:15 | BENNETT | Well, I should probably start...when I actually started. When I was 20 is when I went into the business. I produced my first film at 35 in New York City which was $850,000 called 'A Brother's Kiss'. So before that, yes, I was an assistant editor, I was a production manager.  And it was the 1990s in New York, which I've always called it sort of the golden age of independents, where it was the rise of Miramax and other independent distributors.  But in New York City at that time, there was probably 10 to 15 one- to three-million-dollar movies being made per year. Sundance was rising. Wall Street was investing because they thought they could make it for a low price and then sell it for three times, and there was a community of us making these very low-budget movies in this environment.  I went on to do 'Too Tired to Die', which was 1.5 million, and then, really, my first break was 'Boiler Room', which was a New Line movie. I was budgeting it for, I think, $3 million for a different studio, and New Line came in, picked it up and said, "We're gonna make it for 7." And I thought I hit the jackpot going from a $3 million to a $7 million budget. It was still a challenge.  And then that was when I'd left New York and went to Toronto and made a couple movies, which then brought me to L.A.  I...I guess once I got to L.A...Quentin's producer, Lawrence Bender, called and said, "Lookit, I understand you have some Asian experience. You've worked in Japan. Quentin's writing his fourth film and I'm gonna get it in a couple weeks, and when we get it, we're gonna have you read it. He's looking for a new line producer. We'll bring in you and a couple other people, you meet and see what happens." Great.  So three months, four months later, Lawrence calls. I'm prepping a movie. He's like, "OK, just heard from Quentin. He's gonna be done in a couple of weeks. You're gonna come in, read it, interview, and then we'll see what happens."  Six months go by, I make 'Enough' with Jennifer Lawrence...or Jennifer Lopez, and he calls again and he's like, "OK, the script is ready. You've gotta be here tomorrow, read the script, and you're gonna meet Quentin."  So I'm in Detroit. I come in. I'm staying at a friend's house and there was the package. I open it up. 225 pages, was the script. I read it.  I then go into the office and meet Quentin, and he's talking about the film, I'm asking questions. We probably talked 45 minutes. He leaves. Lawrence comes in and says, "OK, get started." We had talked for so long. For whatever reason, nobody ever else came in and it just became my job, and then I spent two years with him making the movie. And it was an extraordinary experience. |
| 00:11:11:12 | JACQUI | Yeah, look, it sounds like that adage, "Luck is preparation meets opportunity." So... |
| 00:11:18:20 | BENNETT | That's what I always say. That is what I always say, is that there's three ingredients to really excelling in any field.  One is you have to be ready and great at what you do. After that, you have to be persistent and keep putting yourself out there, because if you do that, then you create luck, and you have to have luck.  But persistence and being ready for that moment, then that's really how you excel. |
| 00:11:54:00 | JACQUI | Was there a third, did you say? Did I miss a third? You had your three ingredients. |
| 00:11:58:12 | BENNETT | The third is luck. I find persistence, then luck. |
| 00:12:02:11 | JACQUI | Yeah, OK. |
| 00:12:03:12 | BENNETT | Because luck is being there at the right time, at the right moment... |
| 00:12:06:14 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:12:07:14 | BENNETT | ..with the right skill set for what they need, and then... |
| 00:12:12:10 | JACQUI | But, clearly, you'd had your hands on all the tools before. You'd been editing, cinematography, grip. Like, you'd had that background where... |
| 00:12:20:16 | BENNETT | Yeah, but they don't know... I mean, they don't... Look, I mean, when...when we got started on 'Kill Bill', Quentin... And this is just an example of you're ready but you're not ready for whatever you get thrown into. Because every time you go into a film, I'm always learning more. You have new challenges. And that's part of what's...making movies so great, is that you're constantly learning and constantly faced with new challenges.  He comes to me and says, "I know I can do House of Blue Leaves," which is 'Volume 1', "in a stage in L.A., but I wanna go to Asia and shoot it with an Asian crew because I want that type of skill set to bleed into the film and make it feel like a real Asian martial arts film." "So, I wanna go over there, I wanna go to Hong Kong, Tokyo, Beijing and see what happens."  I'm like, "OK, let's go."  And, you know, we go to Hong Kong, we go to Tokyo, we go to Beijing and he has a great time there, and that was in November 2001.  We come out and he's like, "OK, we're gonna do it in Beijing," and I'm like, "OK." Beijing at that time, you know, I didn't think we could be able to do it, but because it's Quentin, it was, "OK, let's get started."  We hire a Japanese production designer. Does not speak English. And he had drawn... Quentin has drawn House of Blue Leaves on a tablecloth in a restaurant and that's what we're basically building off of.  I thought, "OK, I'll go to Miramax and they'll stop this. They'll understand it's too crazy to go to Beijing and do it."  And when I called up my bosses there, they're like, "You know what? After 9/11, China's probably the safest place. You go there and do it."  And it was amazing because... I think partly because Quentin had so much respect, everybody that came on... And, you know, he has such international recognition that everybody just followed him, and it was extraordinary. Because I probably brought 15 people over from L.A. The rest was predominantly a Chinese and a Japanese crew.  Now, I had never been to China. I had... You know, my experience was in New York City, but...I knew that I had to find a way to get it done and that's probably the cornerstone of producing, is that...is creative problem-solving... |
| 00:14:52:02 | JACQUI | Mm. |
| 00:14:53:02 | BENNETT | ..is you're faced with problems every day, but it's the creative problem-solving that actually turns liabilities into assets. |
| 00:15:01:11 | JACQUI | And I love that because I've often said, you know, the business of creativity is as creative, sometimes, as, you know, what ends up on the screen, or there's all that decision-making behind, which, as you say...  I'm just gonna remind for people who are listening in or tuned in that people are starting to put some questions in the Chat and you can put some in. There are some questions coming in about 'MK II' and I'm gonna get to that, but just...  We're sort of getting there about your experiences in Australia, and I think that'll be even all the more interesting because of this global experience that you bring into that, and that gives you a particular perspective.  But, I think, why don't... Just starting to get into that, your role now as executive producer, talk us through that.  I'm imagining people listening in to this are gonna be from the industry, some not, but, you know, I think it's always good to go back to basics. And talk us through your EP role.  As we all know, when we go to the movies, we see all those credits and I know - 'cause I've seen you at work - is you're really the one running around doing a lot of that creative problem-solving. And we've had strikes and all sorts of things while you've been here. But, you know, talk us through your kind of... The responsibilities you hold in the last sort of... You know, where you're at now in your career, what does that mean? What are you doing when you're executive-producing a big-scale Hollywood film? Talk us through...talk us through that. |
| 00:16:34:24 | BENNETT | Well, what I can say, from my very first movie in 1995 to 'Mortal Kombat', I've done the same thing, which has different titles, but it's...it's...it's...  You know, the formal thing is I'm a line producer. And there's two producers. There's a creative producer, which is the one that will take 2 to 5, 10 years to convince a studio to put the money in and make it, and as soon as they decide they want to make it, they bring me on to execute.  So a lot of times, I say I'm the field producer, the day-to-day producer, but I'm taking the script and putting a budget and a production plan. Then the director and I go out and, hand in hand, we go and execute the film.  So I am the one that is first on the ground, last out and dealing with, you know, making sure that we're able to make the film that the studio has granted on the amount of money.  And since there are so many moving parts, you're always over budget or under budget at any given time. And depending on the size, those ratios are what you're dealing with, whether it's...you're managing a $500,000 overage on a weekly basis or a $3 million, you know, overage. Because people...  You don't really know until... In a 120-, 130-page script with X amount of sets and X amount of scenes, until you really get the designs, get everything defined and director walks on set, you don't know what all the final elements are. You're basically guessing and doing ranges and as you are going through the process of prep, shoot and post, you're moving the money around, hopefully in the right areas that both the director and the studio wants.  So it is a balancing act because then when you add the unforeseens, whether you can go out during the day and get rained on or something happens to an actor, you then have to compensate for that.  And what I can say is the studio expects you to solve that problem, not to go to them and say, "What do you wanna do?" I have to go to my boss with at least two plans whenever we have a problem so they can decide the right route. |
| 00:19:11:06 | JACQUI | Yeah, great. |
| 00:19:12:06 | BENNETT | Does that explain it? |
| 00:19:13:15 | JACQUI | Yeah, no, I think it's very good and I'm also... Just through the questions we're getting, I think there are a lot of people who - we'll get to that later - who want to understand how to break in, how to pitch, how to, you know, put their scripts or their projects to the attention of the right people.  But let's stay up in the big world of Hollywood for the moment and talk us through that...you know, the decision-making of Hollywood, using 'Mortal Kombat', 'cause you've made two of them in Australia, that decision about, you know...  'Cause, as you were described by someone to me today as a 'suitcase producer', i.e. you can be anywhere at any time and you'll go what's best for the project, I guess. But, you know, talk us through that... |
| 00:19:59:04 | BENNETT | But that's...that's the interesting thing, is that when I got into this, I thought I was gonna stay in New York, stay in L.A. and make movies there because that's what we did. You would go and make a Hollywood movie in Hollywood and then go off to location.  It wasn't until around 2005 that Hollywood started to leave L.A. and they were basically chasing tax incentives. |
| 00:20:29:10 | JACQUI | Yep. |
| 00:20:30:18 | BENNETT | And it started on an international level with Canada and Australia and the UK, and then in a domestic, in the States where, you know, Atlanta and London are the two busiest places on the planet because of their rebates, and it didn't really start till 2005.  It became a 'suitcase producer' because now that's what it is. And I spend, on average, a year and a half on a film to two years, so I'm always out in the field, and there's now not a place on the earth you cannot drop me and I cannot build a production facility and execute a film.  I mean, I think, I go back to when I came to Australia my very first time in 2003 on 'Stealth'. That... And I guess what I wanna illustrate is that every film is unique. You just can't say, "OK, make that film in New Zealand versus Australia."  On 'Stealth', that film was being made in Los Angeles and it had, you know, a different line producer on it and the studio decided, "You know, we should probably explore Australia," because they were starting to promote their federal tax incentive. And the line producer was like, "I'm not leaving home."  Now, I had just come off 'Kill Bill'. It was $100 million film. It was gonna be my first $100 million film. I was like, "I'll go." And I came out with the head of finance from the studio to basically be like, "OK, can we do this here?"  And we were in Sydney, we were in Brisbane, we came to the GC. And one of the riskiest decisions I made which then my boss at the time, who was running Columbia, said was the most...the best decision, was to build the planes in Sydney.  The original plan was to build the planes in L.A. because that's where the craftsmen were, that's who they knew, ship the planes and then assemble them here.  After spending time in Sydney and understanding the boat culture, the boat technology that was inherent to the community in Sydney, I went to my boss and said, "You know, we can make these planes in Sydney and, you know, just save on the cost plus of doing it in a different place."  And it was... They weren't sure at that time. 2003 was a very different production climate.  But...but we did. We shipped 'em back to San Diego and they were the only foreign planes that have ever been on a US aircraft carrier, ever. |
| 00:23:21:09 | JACQUI | Well, there you go. So, let's talk about... So all those great skills and, you know, I guess 'Mortal Kombat' make... You know, convincing executives... |
| 00:23:33:19 | BENNETT | Well, 'Mortal Kombat', yeah, see, if we go to 'Mortal Kombat' now, 'Mortal Kombat 1' was a property that was in development for 10 years. So my partner, the creative producer on the project, Todd Garner, he was pushing this thing for 10 years to get made.  Now, it was a bit of liability because the IP and the prior films were made in the '90s. It was not like... It was a hard sell to do that.  I met the director probably... Let's see. We started in '19, I probably met him in 2016, 2017. And New Line, the studio, was like, "OK, let's try to get this off the ground."  We were gonna do it in Belfast. We were gonna do it in Prague. We looked at South Africa.  They rewrote the script and they weren't necessarily dictating where it was going. They just knew they couldn't spend that much money on a reboot, on something new.  And I was going off, I did a movie, come back, they gave me a new script, tried a different production centre.  And it was my boss at New Line, Kate Beyda, who explored the Producer's Offset in Australia because our other creative producer, James Wan, was Australian, the director was Australian and there was inherent characters within that script that was Australian, and we qualified for a Producer's Offset.  Now, we thought we hit the jackpot once we got the Producer's Offset, but we didn't have the state. Queensland was booked out. New South Wales was booked out. And the studio went to South Australia and they were like, "Sure, we'll give you 10%," and that's where they put us without a feasibility study.  And Adelaide was a challenging production environment because they're used to doing more contemporary, a lot less complicated, or just not action/fantasy, and we grew out of the studios incredibly quickly because I had a first unit, second unit - that's in itself 300 people on the shooting crew - and we had to move into warehouses and...  But the decision to come here was purely the fact that 'Mortal Kombat 1', they only wanted to spend so much and we couldn't find a place in the world, and it took many, many years to find the right place.  So when 'Mortal Kombat 2' came around, they obviously... You know, they wrote a script that was more studio-based and it came out of the fact of what the first film satisfied and didn't satisfy and they took that information.  And we knew we wanted to try Queensland because Village Roadshow was such a strong production base, not just for the shooting, but also for the manufacturing.  And I think, you know, the thing I always sort of bring a focus to is that, on these types of movies, you have a shooting crew of 100, 150 people on first unit, you have a shooting crew of 100, 150 people on second unit, so it's like having two films.  > But then when you add the manufacturing component where you are making everything from boots to land fixtures to...you know, to the food, that it just increases to 800 people, and the craftsmanship is incredibly high.  Out of both of the films... And the last time I had been in Australia was 2004 and then I came in 2019 on the first film - that the level of craftsmanship just really was incredible...you know, to the point where I think... Yeah, London has very high craftsmanship. Atlanta doesn't, because the craftsmanship was in Los Angeles and when it moved from Los Angeles to Atlanta, that skill died out.  But I would say, after London, Australia has the second-best craftsmanship in the world. |
| 00:27:54:10 | JACQUI | That's great. I have to say, I've had the privilege of popping in on set, and I know it's going to take people much longer to get to see...see the film, but I was blown away by what I got to see, just the fa... Like, the weaponry, of course, and... Which is important to action, and I'm assuming also you're balancing fans and, you know, as you say, the genre... The action genre has grown in...in its, you know... That attention to detail, I think, is... Just everything was incredible and beautiful.  And so happy to see so many local Queenslanders and maybe other Australians working on...on that.  Can you also talk to us about balancing...you know, the visual effects component? So that sort of choreography of fights and, you know, you've got this incredible set with all this detail, but you're also sort of planning for visual effects in the mix, and, you know, just, as you say, all these things you're balancing in that. But I think it's really important, it's a big part of action, and particularly fantasy action, getting all those pieces, the craftsmanship, the narrative, keeping the emotional resonance and then visual story... visual effects in the mix as well. |
| 00:29:10:09 | BENNETT | Well, it's the scope, it's scope. What the audiences want are scope as well, I think - I think - and that's what visual effects does. Which is, you know, when you're finished shooting, you... Whether it's a 3D creature or you're adding backgrounds...  I had a particular set called the Sky Temple, which the concept design was eight pagodas. Now, we only had space and budget to build two pagodas, but in the film you'll be seeing eight most of the time.  And, you know, that's...that's the success story of the incentive that Australia has, is, yes, we do come in and we spend a boatload of money in six months, which is a large infusion that multiplies out into the community. But what also has evolved is the digital effects companies that are here. |
| 00:30:12:02 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:30:13:02 | BENNETT | And they're not just working on Australian films, they're working consistently on Hollywood films that are not even shot here. |
| 00:30:20:11 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:30:21:11 | BENNETT | And so, through that incentive, it builds out sort of a permanent infrastructure.  And I told you this before, where one of our creative partners is Rising Sun Pictures out of Adelaide. But they just recently opened up 50 seats in Brisbane, so I made sure that we were gonna go to capacity when we awarded the contract, because the skill is there, meaning the oversight in Adelaide. And it was just to be able to...to infuse a facility in Brisbane... It just needs to happen.  Melbourne and Sydney have great vendors, and we use them, but you run out of people. You run out, because they... If they could hire 300 people, they would.  So to build a centre in Brisbane, I mean, that... It's smart, and it's needed, because you can't just expect that you can use vendors just in a couple of cities. You just run out of people. |
| 00:31:30:13 | JACQUI | So listen, there's a question here from JD which I really like, which is, "What did you learn on shooting 'MK 2' that happened that has changed how you will approach your next production? What was the new thing you learnt?" And they've said, "Apart from the strikes." But aside from the strikes, what's something you've learnt on this latest production that you've kind of gone, "Wow!" |
| 00:31:59:12 | BENNETT | I can't tell you it's a wow because I have been through so much that after I did 'Great Wall' in China with Matt Damon... There's not a problem I can't solve. So...so even though we had a labour strike the last four months... You know, the thing that...that....I will always do is I doubled up the fight choreography time from, typically, two months to four months. And that really... In...  We had 18 to 20 fights. And what that did was give the other departments time to catch up.  So often, in these types of movies, action movies, is that, look at the first... The first act is fantastic. James Bond movies, if you like James Bond movies, they spend all their money in the first act action sequences. First thing up, you know, and then the third act does not deliver like the first. And so the second act gets half the time, and then you're chasing the third. And the third is the one that always gets short-changed in preparation time.  So I think the thing that I did on this one is I doubled up the time for the fight team, and that really paid off in the quality of the film. I mean, I think... |
| 00:33:33:24 | JACQUI | Just help us understand that a bit more, like, so by doubling up, it gave, what? You could test the weaponry and the props and the... What does that actually mean? |
| 00:33:43:07 | BENNETT | Well, it was actually just fight design, meaning... |
| 00:33:45:06 | JACQUI | Oh, just fight design. The choreography. |
| 00:33:47:22 | BENNETT | You know, we spent a l... You know, because...because, you know, there was 18 to 20 fights, there can be fight fatigue, you know, when somebody watches the film.  So I like to make sure that we talk through the fights so there's...there's a rhythm as well as understanding the point of view and the narrative anchor of each of the fights so that there is a journey.  And it's tough, because, typically, you'll get the script and, you know, it'll explain the fight, but you have to dig into the character, dig into also what are... what type of fight are they gonna do?  The thing that 'Mortal Kombat'... The thing that's interesting about 'Mortal Kombat' is that it's a hand-to-hand fighting sequence. I mean, it's a movie that's hand-to-hand fighting, which is in one way very straightforward.  'John Wick' is hand-to-hand fighting. Where, if you look at 'Mission: Impossible', it has hand-to-hand but it's also situational action as well, given you put them in a train and that's the added action piece with some hand-to-hand. Or if you take a Marvel film, it's a lot of flying and, you know, power beams and things like that.  'Mortal Kombat' is very grounded in hand-to-hand, so you can fall into fight fatigue very easily. So by designing and then act... You know, then you have the fight team act it out, you shoot it.  Then the other departments can start adding. "OK, we can use a weapon here." Or, "OK, this is the costume, what the costume has to do here."  In our very... In our first film we didn't have that, so our costumes were falling apart midway through the shooting of action sequences, and then we were just chasing it and all that. Second time around, you know, we were obviously, you know, a little bit more savvy about it. |
| 00:35:50:20 | JACQUI | OK, that's good. So you've learnt the... how to avoid fight fatigue, and really make those fight sequences hold up and...  I'm just going, you know... Some of the questions here around...getting in. The beginner's job. There's a lot of that. And someone, Zane, has asked, you know, that... You said it before, persistence is key, but where's that point where cold calling...where does it become annoying, and what is that pathway in for...for emerging producers? How do they sort of get their foot in the door, and what do you take kindly to? |
| 00:36:29:18 | BENNETT | Well, are you referring to the industry or a specific job? Because I think... |
| 00:36:35:01 | JACQUI | Well, this is broad on the industry, but I guess people are talking about... Well, it's not necessarily being specific, but I'm gonna say, like, is there a point where, if you... This is a real question. Like, do you get blacklisted if you annoy too much and over-contact people?  I'm assuming that would be the case where... Because everyone's time is precious. Your time is precious, right? But how do you get that balance right, you know? What are the places that you can get in and get your foot in the door? And it is a general question. |
| 00:37:07:04 | BENNETT | Yeah, if they... Well, yeah, it's... I think it's easier than when I broke in, um, back in, you know... I mean, I... My first film I produced was '95, but I started 15 years before that. But I think... You know, we're coming up... The level of production...is high. |
| 00:37:35:09 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:37:36:09 | BENNETT | And I think one of the things that is great about the production environment in Australia is you have a very healthy local industry as well as a Hollywood industry. So getting a job on a low-budget local film is much easier than a Marvel film that comes into Disney Studios. |
| 00:37:56:14 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:37:57:15 | BENNETT | But by getting on that local film, you're gonna be with people that are moving on to a larger Hollywood film, because they do both. So really...my advice is...take any film, because you don't know where that's gonna lead you and you don't know who you're gonna meet. And I think that's the starting place.  I mean, actors, new actors, after they get cast and they do the film, they're like, "Great, I'm gonna move to L.A. and I'm gonna really work at it."  It's like, "No, no, no, no. You're getting jobs here in Australia. Stay here, because we're coming here... We're not gonna hire you in L.A. and fly you here. You should stay here, you know, or go to London or go to Atlanta, and that's where you want to be because that's where you're gonna get the opportunities."  You're gonna go to L.A. You're gonna get an agent. What is that agent gonna do, you know? I mean, I think you need to... It's just taking any building block and then using that to go to the next step. |
| 00:39:07:05 | JACQUI | Yeah. Yeah. |
| 00:39:08:12 | BENNETT | It's not... I mean, they want to know, are you annoying? Sure, there's probably a threshold of them knowing this, but do people get blacklisted? No, I think... But... It's... It's... Am I going to hire craft service people? No. I don't even know the company that was on our film, you know? It's production managers and production coordinators, and those are the people that you meet on any level of production throughout Australia. |
| 00:39:41:08 | JACQUI | I suppose there's that element of trust too, because you are working with, um, you know, you're working with a number of the same people, right, that you worked with on 'Mortal Kombat' 1 and 2, you know? |
| 00:39:53:07 | BENNETT | I'm working with people that have worked with me since 'Stealth' in 2005. |
| 00:39:57:19 | JACQUI | Yeah, well, there you go. So that's your point, right? That you trust... Like, it's that... You want that... 'Cause it's a stressful environment, so you want the shorthand, you want... And so those relationships that you build as a student, or in having those low-budget opportunities to, you know, build your craft... |
| 00:40:14:19 | BENNETT | Yeah, well, here's what I would say... |
| 00:40:16:14 | JACQUI | But solve problems. More dash than cash. |
| 00:40:20:07 | BENNETT | Here's what I would say about lower-budget films. You're gonna get more responsibility, and that's what you want. You want more... |
| 00:40:28:21 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:40:29:23 | BENNETT | Filmmaking is an apprenticeship field. Meaning, the more you do it, the more comfortable you act in that environment when you're under pressure.  Film school is important because you learn history, you learn theory, you learn how to...you learn how to tell a good shot, you know, to tell a story. But...being in that production environment, to feel at ease in that pressure, is doing it again and again and again. |
| 00:41:02:13 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:41:03:13 | BENNETT | That's why, when I said to you, "After 'Great Wall', you know, there's not a problem that I can't solve," it's because, you know, very often, early in my career, I would have a problem and I'd freeze. I was like, "Holy crap, what am I gonna do?" Now it's just, like, if I don't come up with the answer in the first couple of hours, I know I've just got to sleep on it and in the morning, something will come to me. |
| 00:41:27:14 | JACQUI | Yeah, and that's that you've got the trust in... That you've solved problems so many times before that there's always a solution and... |
| 00:41:35:18 | BENNETT | And that's why lower-budget films, you know, they can't hire as many people, and that's where you get the opportunity, that's where you get the responsibility. |
| 00:41:45:03 | JACQUI | So, given your global perspective, and, I think...you know, I don't think, from an Australian-market perspective, there is pressure on the local industry. And we need to keep, you know, making local films and keep that industry going.  But also there's great successes from Australians who are making... Increasingly, more shows from Australia that are making it on the global stage. Most recently, 'Boy Swallows Universe', which is, you know, a very local story that's just been a breakout success on Netflix... |
| 00:42:16:05 | BENNETT | Very local. Queensland. It's a Brisbane story. |
| 00:42:18:06 | JACQUI | Well, very local Queensland, and even Brisbane, a very local Brisbane story, very specifically set in the '80s. But I think, just from your perspectives, what is it you think that, as Australians, we need to keep doing or do more of? And, you know, what are those ingredients to have our stories be successful on a global stage that maybe you, Bennett, is... You're gonna say, "I'm gonna come and produce an Australian story here, not just a global story here."  But what are those...those ingredients that you think we all need to be mindful of in being successful in that kind of global industry as, you know, what... What's that sort of qualities that need to resonate, you know, that makes audiences, not just local audiences... |
| 00:43:05:13 | BENNETT | Yeah, I think...it's...it's... It's a little difficult, because people will say, you know, storytelling is universal. I mean, if... So...you have the narrative or what the story is. And...I guess...it's... Because, I mean, if you take 'Boy Swallows Universe', I mean, it's getting some international attention now. You can say it's because of the platform - you know, it's Netflix and it lives and dies on clicks. But...I think it's... You know, it's quality storytelling. You know, if you take...if you take...if you take... I mean, 'Boy Swallows' is interesting because it's a period film in the '70s, I believe, or '80s. |
| 00:44:09:11 | JACQUI | '80s, yeah. |
| 00:44:10:20 | BENNETT | '80s in Brisbane. So it's...it's also even that accessible as a time period. You know, the '80s is sort of, like... What is the '80s? Was it just bad hair? And I think, you know, it's...it's... And it gets...it's getting, you know, recognition and I think it's in the storytelling. It's not, you know, adding pyrotechnics and digital effects onto something that is inherently not. I mean, you know... Taika's a good example of a filmmaker that is doing very, very New Zealand-type films... |
| 00:44:52:13 | JACQUI | Yeah. |
| 00:44:53:14 | BENNETT | ..and then doing 'Thor'. You know? Um... So it's hard. I think...what's important is to...to have the support and to keep making it. And I think both on a state and a federal level, you guys have very healthy programs to support local stories. And that's incredibly important, because you don't know what... You know...a film hits for no apparent reason. You don't know, you know? It can be a moderate success but then it can be a hit.  Nobody thought 'Barbie' was gonna be a $1.4 billion film. I was working at the studio on 'MK 2'. They were afraid that thing was gonna tank after the director's screening. So they saw the entire film and they were terrified it was gonna tank.  So, you know, in some regards, nobody knows, really, what's gonna work. So it goes back to...as a filmmaker, you need to be confident with your point of view...your eye, and be bold enough to stand by it.  So...I mentioned film school. Is whether you shoot it on your iPhone or if you have an ALEXA LF, is that... Telling a story visually, you know, is so important and...and knowing...when you have a good shot, that that is a good shot. And having a strong point of view.  Because I think the one thing that I've learned... You know, because I have no interest in directing. It's an incredibly hard job. I love what I do as...as a producer, but...what... I mean, I love what I do because I love analysing a director's creative process. Because every director has a different creative process. And when you understand what yours is, then you get to support...you know how to ask for the support, that's gonna make you more creative.  So I like that analysis because all we want is a better film, which is better creativity. Um...and I think, you know...what I've been... Out of the directors that I've worked with...what they appreciate...is a point of view. So, you know, half the time, my ideas are bad. But what they always want is my point of view. They want an honest point of view.  And having that is being confident in yourself, of knowing what's good and what's bad. And that's, you know, that's going through film school or watching 3,000 movies or writing a dozen scripts. You know, and... It goes back to what I said - it's an apprenticeship field. |
| 00:47:59:01 | JACQUI | An apprenticeship. I totally agree. And a chicken-and-egg thing. So are you normally hired by the director or are you bringing directors in? Where... |
| 00:48:07:04 | BENNETT | No, the director and I are...pretty much hired at the same time I mean, sometimes... You know, you take somebody like Quentin. You know, he...he has the project, so I meet him. But very often when they get the script, the director and I come on at the same time. |
| 00:48:23:15 | JACQUI | OK. Because we have a number of questions here from people who are interested in that path to becoming a successful director or the most important questions to ask when you're being hired for a film as a director. And I'm wondering, um... I know you come from the producing perspective, but I think what I've heard from you just say, it's that apprenticeship thing - just watch lots of films. Read, write. Do lots of drafts. But that very authentic point of view. So you've got that really... You know, what is it that... What advice would you give for people who are looking to get into directing and...or even, you know... |
| 00:49:01:21 | BENNETT | Make a short film. |
| 00:49:03:11 | JACQUI | Pardon? Make short films? |
| 00:49:05:24 | BENNETT | Make and write. Meaning your first script could be the worst script ever, but do it and then go to your next. Make short films, because when you construct...a short film, you go through that process of, like, "Ugh, why did I make that decision when I was shooting?" You know? "Why didn't I get that side of it?" You know? Or... You know, how often do you put together your film, whether it's a short film - one minute, two minutes, 10 minutes - you show it to people, it's like... You know, they didn't feel like they went on a journey.  You know, it's... It's an incredibly complicated...field because of...all the elements we put together. I mean, everything's controlled, so... |
| 00:49:55:00 | JACQUI | And it costs real money! |
| 00:49:58:10 | BENNETT | And it costs real money. |
| 00:49:59:15 | JACQUI | Yeah, yeah. |
| 00:50:00:15 | BENNETT | You know, so you can point to directors... I mean, it's...it's... It's amazing, I...obviously harp on Quentin because, you know, I think he's brilliant. He's one of the...most freest...creative directors I've ever worked with. Meaning when he's on set, he is loose. He's a jazz player. Like, he is so comfortable.  And the reason why... And I've produced three films for Martin Scorsese. He's a basket case when he's going through the process.  Quentin...almost... Quentin directs during writing. So he writes around the topic for three years. So there's nothing he doesn't know, because he's...he's written through it so many times. And if you look at his films...the settings are a Quentin setting. He has affected everything. It's not a real setting. It's not a real place. It always feels like, "Wow, it bends a little bit this way." And I... That's, you know... So I'm sort of presenting an extreme position because he's so gifted and he's so relaxed at it. |
| 00:51:22:24 | JACQUI | Yeah, I have to say... And that comes across in your reel. You're clearly great at working with these directors that, um...create worlds, um...and 'Mortal Kombat's a world, you know, and Quentin creates... As you say, they're very defined worlds that you're stepping into as well as all of that action and... |
| 00:51:42:16 | BENNETT | Well, and that's...that's the point of view. I...I... The directors of 'John Wick', you know, they were action directors first. And I worked with them a lot and they brought me in on the very first cut of 'John Wick'. On the Avid. Just, you know, it was...ragtag. They had a hard time doing it.  And...and I watched it and... You know, they had all their questions. They were insecure, all that. But it had such a strong point of view. And they held it. It wasn't much of a story. His dog got killed and he was mad. You know, but...it told it through a point of view and held it.  Sure, there was tons of things to work, but it was...it was like, you know, they had another six months of post. And it was...  And I'd say to them, "You got this. Sure, there's stuff [indistinct], but just keep that point of view and it's gonna be a hit." |
| 00:52:47:08 | JACQUI | Great. Look, we're kind of out of time, or almost out of time. And so, um... I am just... |
| 00:52:55:10 | BENNETT | I told you I could blab, right? I told you I could blab. |
| 00:52:58:05 | JACQUI | Yeah, yeah! No, but it's all good. And we got to, I think, most of the, um, questions. Someone wants to meet you at the AACTAs. Are you gonna be there? |
| 00:53:07:15 | BENNETT | What's that? |
| 00:53:08:16 | JACQUI | The screen awards. Oh, I think you're... When are you leaving? When are you on the road again? |
| 00:53:13:02 | BENNETT | No, I think, I think, I think... |
| 00:53:14:17 | JACQUI | You'll be at the AACTAs? |
| 00:53:15:22 | BENNETT | I think I'm gonna go. Well, I think I'll go to the 8th and the 10th. |
| 00:53:19:12 | JACQUI | Yeah, OK. Terrific. Well, you're gonna be around. Bennett will be around at the AACTAs. But I guess just as a final message, 'cause, you know, we love to hear it, but talk to us about your experiences filming in Queensland and the Gold Coast.  And you know, like, I'm just gonna acknowledge that you've been very generous. We've had to do some tours and you've always made yourself available. But you know, just give us that sort of, you know, what your experience has been here, filming in Queensland, as your final message. |
| 00:53:50:19 | BENNETT | Well, shooting on the Gold Coast is wonderful, I think, um... |
| 00:53:54:19 | JACQUI | Because? |
| 00:53:57:03 | BENNETT | It's... It's several things A, the government makes it very transparent how you can get the support. I think the Gold Coast, with Village Roadshow, has...has a strong production base. Um, and...you know, but you also have the landscape. So, you know, we changed things in our script to take advantage of Mount Tamborine. Or we went into sort of more of the rugged landscape.  Um, it's... You can put a studio anywhere. But it doesn't necessarily mean you're gonna attract crew to live there. So the quality of life, and how Australia is as a country, has sort of, you know, created this population of craftsmen and technicians that really love it here and love what they do. So you have great quality of crew here. And to be able to come in and there's such certainty when you throw a drawing down, and it needs to be built and then shot and lit.  And I've been in countries where you put a drawing down and you don't know what you're gonna get at the end of the day. But here, you get the highest quality of craftsmanship. So it's...it's the certainty that you have when you come to Queensland as well as the Gold Coast.  And I think the thing that I only wish of more is that capacity could be higher. More stages and more crew. |
| 00:55:40:13 | JACQUI | OK. |
| 00:55:41:14 | BENNETT | Because there are limits. There are limits. |
| 00:55:43:23 | JACQUI | Yep. We're working on it! |
| 00:55:48:10 | BENNETT | But I think, you know, but I think it's...it's...it's... That's the thing about Hollywood and local productions. They can co-exist at the same time, because, sure, you might have a cameraman in both units, but they somehow are able to co-exist because there are...the offset requirements are different. You know, when you have capacity issues. Um, but I have to say that, you know, if I could stay here the rest of my life, and make moves in Australia and on the Gold Coast, and then see what happens in the growth of Queensland, I'd be very, very happy. |
| 00:56:29:08 | JACQUI | Well, I think that's a fantastic way to finish. And thanks for everyone who tuned in and those who are gonna watch at a later time. And... |
| 00:56:39:01 | BENNETT | Well, thank you for having me, it's really... |
| 00:56:41:00 | JACQUI | Thank you. Thank you again for bringing 'Mortal Kombat 2' to Queensland but also your generosity and...just general good spirit And I'm sure it's been an awesome experience for the crew working on 'Mortal Kombat'. And you've got months of post-production to do, so we'll look forward to seeing it eventually, 'Mortal Kombat 2'. So thanks...thanks to you all. |
| 00:57:05:22 | BENNETT | Thank you for having me. Really a pleasure to be here. |
| 00:57:08:07 | JACQUI | Thank you, Bennett. See ya. 'Bye. |