

## **50 MPH: EPISODE 26**

### **“GOING DOWN?”**

Transcript (00:42:05)



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**KRIS TAPLEY**

This is *50 MPH*!

**[INTRO MUSIC]**

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Pop quiz, hotshot!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

There’s a bomb on a bus.

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

If it drops below fifty...

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

...it blows up.

**ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)**

Oh, darn.

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?!

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

What do you do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

OK, welcome back. We took a breather last week to stretch our legs and now, we are almost at the finish line on principal photography for *Speed*. As 1993 started to draw to a close, with the bulk of the bus material covered, there were still two big sequences left to shoot. Today we’re going to dig into the one that kicks off the movie. Including the opening credits sequence, the first act of *Speed* is a 23-minute, hair-raising bit of business that pulls you in and puts you on notice for the kind of movie you’re about to watch. A group of 13 business folks cram into an elevator in downtown Los Angeles’ Gas Company Tower and begin making their way down to the lobby. Just then, lunatic bomber Howard Payne blows the cables and holds them all hostage with the emergency brakes rigged to explode if his ransom demands are not met. Here’s director Jan de Bont to start us off today.

**JAN DE BONT**

I know that people have, like I do, aversion to being caught in an elevator that’s caught and hanging somewhere in the middle. This has happened to me once. I thought if I could make it look true, how you actually feel if you’re stuck in an elevator, it can be a really great scene with a great payoff at the end. But the moment you do that, you have to figure out how the hell you’re going to film that. Because we could not build a gigantic, 20-story elevator set, so we had to do it in sections.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And here is casting director Risa Bramon Garcia talking a little bit about the actors you see in there.

**RISA BRAMON GARCIA**

Some of the elevator were people who were friends of people. Like, this is where you put your people. But Patrick Hurley, Patrick Fischler, Susan Barnes, Mailhouse, Barry Kramer, these were all lovely actors, good character actors who just, you know, people I knew.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Now, I was not able to round up each and every one of the actors in the elevator like I was with the bus section, but I did manage to get ahold of a few of them. So, let's get them in here. First up, probably the most recognizable face on that elevator and the actor who has gone on to have the most success is Patrick Fischler, who plays "Friend of Executive." But we all know his name is Bob, of course, because he's the guy who presses the button and actor Robert Mailhouse says, "Jesus, Bob, what button did you push?" Anyway, you've seen Patrick all over. He was in *Twister*, *Mulholland Drive* and *The Black Dahlia*, as well as TV's *Mad Men*, *Lost*, *Silicon Valley* and *Once Upon a Time*, among tons of other credits. Here's what Patrick recalls of what would become his true entrée into show business.

### **PATRICK FISCHLER**

Well, this was my SAG card. This was my first job. I grew up in LA, but I had just moved back to LA after NYU and I auditioned for the guy on the bus. There's a guy on the bus – I forgot the actor's name but, like, young-ish, 20-something guy.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

He's talking about the role of Terry, which David Kriegel ultimately played.

### **PATRICK FISCHLER**

So, I auditioned for that and obviously didn't get it, but then my reps were, like, "You got another part. Here's what it is." But, I mean, I'm 23 years old. I've never done anything. I'm coming out of NYU, and I was, you know, joyous. I thought, "Holy shit. What is this?" But I really, really liked Jan. I loved working with him. I remember sort of, like, he liked my look, of my face, and he would talk about that. And I think that's probably how I got the role. I don't think I got the role because, like, "Oh my God, that guy is such a good actor." I didn't get to do anything. So, and that's what I think continued him wanting to work with me. Because he was European director, a cinematographer coming out of Europe, and I think he was super into faces. So, you know, it was my first job making money as an actor and I didn't have to wait tables and never did again, actually. *Speed* was the beginning of never having to – 30 years later, I've never had to have another job.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Next up is Susan Barnes. Susan's credits include *Scrooged*, *Nothing to Lose* and *Nurse Betty*, and she would also return in *Speed 2: Cruise Control*, albeit in a different role. In *Speed* she played "Female Executive," specifically the woman who is frozen, terrified to get off the elevator and finally makes it off just in the nick of time. Susan has an interesting story about how she ended up in that role.

### **SUSAN BARNES**

I was brought in to be on the bus. And I think I came back a time or two, but then, Beth Grant – Beth got the role. And I'd had a good exchange with Jan and he put me through some paces. I didn't get that job and I got a call almost immediately from a playwright named Doris Baisley, a really good playwright that I had known personally for a long time, and she was premiering a play at ACT Seattle. She needed somebody for the

lead, and she called me. And so, I went to Seattle and I did that play. Then I came, as I do – when I come home from being gone on location somewhere, I generally hit the movie theater and see, like, three movies. I catch up on my movies. And I came walking down. I parked my car, you know, like, down from the theater, and when I came out, after watching, I don't know, a couple of movies, it was, like, "Oh my God, the street is blocked off and what?" And then in the distance, I saw the bus, and it was for the final wreck.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

To be clear, she was watching movies at the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood and came out to see all of the set-up for the big stunt involving the subway car bursting out onto Hollywood Blvd. Fancy that.

### **SUSAN BARNES**

And as I was walking down the street, I heard, you know, this voice go, "Susan! Susan!" And it was Jan, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I live up here on the hill, but I just got back from Seattle," blah, blah, blah. And he said, "Oh, stay, stay, stay and watch what we're doing." And I did and it was great to watch it happen. And then I said goodbye to him and I went on home, and about two or three days later, I got a call from the casting woman, Risa Bramon. And she said, "Jan wants you to be in the elevator sequence, which kind of opens the film, and he said he'll give you, you know, a bit. An extra bit." Because I figured that was going to be one day. It was nine days' work. I said, "Oh, OK." So, then, that's how I got in the elevator.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Next up is Richard Gelb, "Elevator Passenger #9." You heard Risa Bramon Garcia mention that this is where friends tend to show up in a movie, in sequences like this. Well, Richard is one such friend, but he's got a fun story about ending up in this particular sequence. Here he is talking about his longtime buddy, producer Mark Gordon.

### **RICHARD GELB**

I've known Mark since 1974. I think I was 16 and he was probably 18. I was working in LA. and he gave me a copy of this script and he said, "Tell me what you think of this." And I read the script. He had not gotten it set up yet, and I remember it was page-turner. And I thought, "This is going to get made. Absolutely." And I said to him, "This is going to get made, and when it gets made, you have to promise me you'll put me in the elevator scene." And he kept his promise.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And here is CeCe Tsou. CeCe plays "Elevator Passenger #7," and like Susan, she first auditioned to be one of the bus passengers.

### **CECE TSOU**

I originally was supposed to be on the bus. They ended up having an older Asian lady on the bus, I believe. They took me off the bus and put me in the elevator because they

didn't want someone, a woman, in the same age as Sandra Bullock, because at the time, it was her big, you know, moment.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

I should probably also mention that someone else in that elevator was Robert Mailhouse. He's the smarmy guy who asks Bob what button he pushed. Again, this is where you get your friends into the project, right? Well, Robert is the drummer of Keanu's band, Dogstar. They have a new album out right now, by the way, and they're touring all over the country at the moment. I think they're over on the east coast this week.

### **SUSAN BARNES**

At the first-day reading, I kept, you know, sort of looking at this young guy who's probably close to – might be a little bit younger than Keanu was. And a really nice-looking kid, tall kid. I realized, because he was, like, always right there, always talking to him. And at first, I thought, "I wonder if this is annoying Keanu." It was, like, "Oh my God, that guy is such a pest." I mean, I was eating lunch and Keanu sat down and then, you know, two, three more minutes later, this kid came and sat down right beside him. I mean, I was across the room and that's when I was just going, "Oh no, no. He's got a fan. He can't even eat lunch." And it was one of his best friends.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

So, that's how all these pieces ended up falling into place. We'll hear from these folks again plus a few more shortly, but let's move into the craft of this sequence, which is substantial. I could get into the opening credits sequence here if I wanted to, which is a whole story, but I think I'll hold onto that a couple more weeks for an upcoming episode focused on the visual effects element of the film. However, the point to be made here is that there are two versions of the elevator shaft at play. There is a full-scale, multi-story shaft that was built on stage 14 at 20th Century Fox, and then there was a miniature version that was built by legendary model maker and effects designer Grant McCune's company. I'll get into that part of it at a later date, but the full-scale stuff is what we'll try to focus on here, and by all accounts, it was a pretty sketchy endeavor. Here's production designer Jackson De Govia.

### **JACKSON DE GOVIA**

This is something different. This is really dangerous. And it was. We try to protect people as much as we can, but you cannot do stuff like that and protect everyone totally. It's like rodeo, you know? You're dealing with something where people can get hurt.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

First assistant director David Sardi.

### **DAVID SARDI**

Obviously, the movie is remembered for its bus work, but for me the most challenging and in some ways dangerous sequence of the whole movie was the elevator sequence.

We built that on a sound stage at Fox and, you know, it was three stories – it was all the way to the grid – of an elevator shaft that had all the danger of a practical elevator shaft, and none of the benefits, right? I mean, we were moving the elevator with a crane outside of the studio with cables run out, you know, and stop and start on a walkie-talkie. There was no precision to any of it. It was all just, like, eyeballing stuff and, you know, “Yeah, that’s good, stop.” As opposed to, like, everything now would be on a computer program.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Art director John Jensen.

**JOHN JENSEN**

We had to cut a hole in the floor all the way down and dug into the dirt, and cut into the perms on the top, all the supporting structure at the top to get enough room for what we needed. The stage wasn’t tall enough so we dug down and cut in up above. It was a little bit difficult to get permission from the studio.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Special effects coordinator John Frazier.

**JOHN FRAZIER**

We would never do this today, but we just – we cut a hole in the roof of the stage and put the crane outside and would lower the whole elevator inside by a crane that’s outside. So, the operator is outside and we’re moving this elevator. Today I’d go, “My God.” We wouldn’t do that today, you know? Because it was so dangerous. You know, when the lady – when you’re worrying about people getting decapitated and stuff? Well, yeah. We were worried about people getting decapitated! Because everything was being done over the radio. “OK, lower it two inches. Lower it two inches. OK, drop it a foot. Drop it a foot. OK, drop it on three.” It was that kind of thing.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Cinematographer Andrzej Bartkowiak.

**ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK**

It was the craziest thing you’ve ever seen. Through the roof, the big crane, construction outside, with a remote, little monitor, those little monitors that were like shit in those days. Then that man operated the elevator, I mean, to an inch, he would stop it and move with tremendous speed. The stuff looking down, we had a matte, a painting on the floor with a perspective painting that we supplemented the lights descending down, so the depth was created by the perspective painting that we laid on the floor. But the actors, definitely, they were hanging. They were in jeopardy all the time! All of the people in the elevator, including Jeff and Keanu and us, were all dependent, in the hands of the man outside who could not see anything except an 8-inch or 9-inch little remote TV monitor.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Second assistant director Maggie Murphy.

### **MAGGIE MURPHY**

The elevator was one of the tallest stages on the lot. And it wasn't rigged with the eye bolts and all the things that needed to hook the harnesses and all the safety things in yet, for the first couple of days. So, people couldn't go out on the I-beams. And it was constantly, like, saying to the camera operator, who would, like, shoulder up a camera and start to go out on the I beam, you know, stories and stories up from the ground of the floor of the stage. Because it went really high in the stage, right? It was like a real elevator shaft. And until they put those eye bolts in to hook into safety harnesses and stuff, Jan would be, like, "I want the camera there and a camera down there." And camera operators, like, they're told to go do, they – you know, like Vern and those guys would shoulder up and go out onto the I-beams and we had to be, like, "No, no, no, no, no, you can't go out there yet." That kind of thing. And then once they got the things in place, it was, like, you know, would I go out there? Hell no. But those guys, those camera operators, they're pretty bold.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

We're just packing them all in here. Stunt coordinator Gary Hymes.

### **GARY HYMES**

You know all the stories about the lion and the helicopter. So, that's Jan, right? So, we're in the elevator set, and we're doing the shot where, remember, they pull that lady out and she just barely makes it and her feet just clear. And this is, like, a practical elevator set we built on stage, but it probably would sever a limb if it hit hard enough. But so, Jan's in there, and I'm safety-ing him and he's operating camera, and he wanted to get this shot where the camera's sticking out and, like, I'm grabbing and pulling him back and he's, like, "You pulled me back too soon!" And I'm like, "Jan, the thing almost took your head off!" Jan has such – I almost call it blind faith. I mean, you know, I'm glad he has that respect that he knows I'm not going to let him die, but it's, like, he would push it so many times. He knows what he's after and he's not afraid to get it, so I have nothing but respect for that.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Let's hear from actor Jeff Daniels on this.

### **JEFF DANIELS**

I remember, like, a three- or four-story drop. It wasn't, like, you know, 20 feet and they had mats down there. It was – we were up. I don't know that they could get away with that now. Safety regulations and all that. But I knew we were kind of dancing around on girders looking down for several flights, and don't make a mistake, you know, on where your feet are going.

### **DAVID SARDI**

We would do that a different way now. I don't envision that we would shoot the set the way we did it. That was really a dangerous set. It was dangerous for the crew. It was

dangerous for the cast. It was hairy, and I think that there would be a better, safer way to do it now, to approach it, you know, with set extensions and some CG work.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And back to Patrick Fischler.

**PATRICK FISCHLER**

Dude, I'm actually really glad I didn't know all of that then. See, that's the thing. Like, now, obviously, I've been working for so long that when I do anything, I'm super involved. I feel like I like to know everything that's happening. Back then, I mean, I was – like I said, I was 22. I didn't know anything that was going on. And nor did they include us in any of that. So, I didn't know any of that. And now I laugh being, like, no wonder we were all kind of freaked out by it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

We'll stick with Patrick here and get back to the actors talking about their experience inside the elevator with all that jolting and dropping and whatnot.

**PATRICK FISCHLER**

I remember that it got a little claustrophobic and stinky in there, because we really were all in there together. They didn't sort of take us in and out a lot, because it was just easier. So, we were in there a long time.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Richard Gelb.

**RICHARD GELB**

Basically, it was a week of work. I had never had that experience before of working as an actor, before or since. And it was hard work. They built an amazing set and they stuck us in an elevator and they hoisted us up and for about a week, they would drop us and blow crap up, and it was difficult. I remember thinking, "I'm in the background of this scene. It's a big scene, but I've got to do something that will maybe make the camera stay a little bit, or get cut into it." And so, I remember really thinking, you know, I've got to act as much as I can, so, however many of us were in that scene, I think we all took it very seriously. Like, we are the elevator people. I remember we would talk about this, like, the whole movie was about us in the elevator. It was a powerful experience. I got sick at the end. Because we were not just being dropped, but we're yelling and there was screaming and it's close in and they're blowing up smoke and little bits of crap, and so, I think at the end of it, it was – they were long days and it took its toll on all of us, I think.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Here is Michael Fujimoto, who plays "Elevator Passenger #8."

**MICHAEL FUJIMOTO**



I remember, like, a lot of times, we wouldn't get cues. So, that's how they would scare us. Like, you know, all of a sudden, like, the elevator would drop, and then we'd be, like, freaking out. I mean, you know, genuinely freaking out, because nobody told us anything about how the elevator is going to drop. I was, like, at a point, a little concerned, because I'm thinking, "Could I die doing this?" Because, you know, they would have the stunt coordinator, you know, do something. And they would kind of say something, like, "Oh, it's protected," or whatever, but I'm thinking, like, "You know, if the elevator goes through when they're pulling me out, don't I die or something like that?" But I mean, I just, you know, went along with it or whatever. But I'm, like, "I'm not sure what I'm getting into." You know, I'm thinking it's kind of dangerous, maybe.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

CeCe Tsou.

### **CECE TSOU**

Yeah, I mean, they said they were going to try to, you know, recreate as much of the experience, so that we would have the real experience. But you're talking about how it's kind of a big fear for everyone that you get, you know, locked up in an elevator and you can't get out, or it drops. You just kind of can go with your own fear. So, any jolt is kind of, like, you know, "Shoot, please don't let, you know, this be the time!" It was hot. It was uncomfortable. You were with strangers. I mean, towards the end of the week, we got to know each other, but, you know, it's pretty much the experience you would have in a real situation like that.

### **PATRICK FISCHLER**

That's Jan's thing that I think maybe went too far on *Twister*. He pushes it to where, to get real fear out of people – once again, I was so young and I just was, like, "This is so fucking cool!"

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, so, meanwhile, Jack and Harry are up on the roof trying to find a way to stall Payne's plan. Jack doesn't want to shoot the hostages. He just wants to take them out of the equation. His bright idea is taking the hook of a window washer winch from the roof, dropping it down the shaft and latching it onto the top of the elevator. Here's Jeff Daniels again.

### **JEFF DANIELS**

We're running up 52 flights of stairs to the roof of this building. And, you know, I come out of New York, you know? Just short of method acting and, you know, make it, you know, as real as possible. So, you know, when you're running up 52 flights of stairs, plus you're wearing all that SWAT gear and carrying the gun and all that – first take, I burst out of that door behind Keanu just breathing like I was coughing up lungs. You know, just, [breathing heavily]. And Jan de Bont said, "Cut it, cut it, cut it." And he goes, "The breathing. No. Not with the breathing." Keanu wasn't – you know, he wasn't breathing at all. He was, like – 52 flights was like a walk-up, you know? Nothing. He goes, "This is not that kind of movie." "OK. Alright. OK." And so, take two, just burst out

like we, you know, just come in off the street and opened the door. He was very clear. “No. Don’t do that. Just don’t do that. I know, I know. But don’t do that. We don’t care. No one cares.” “Got it. OK.” You don’t want your hero, or heroes, for as long as they live, you know, coughing up lungs coming out of doors at rooftops. So, it was, like, “Got it. Understood.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Special effects coordinator John Frazier.

**JOHN FRAZIER**

Yeah, that was pretty crazy working up on the top of the tallest building in the city rigging that stuff. We just kept going.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Not quite the tallest. The US Bank Tower went up in 1986. Hate to be that guy, but go on, John.

**JOHN FRAZIER**

I remember coming out of the door, I’m up on the roof and I see Mike Meinaraus, who’s really turned into a really fine special effects guy. And we were rigging the window washer unit, the one that got sucked into the elevator. And he’s literally standing on the guardrail, and I couldn’t even yell at him. I couldn’t even say, “Get down.” I was afraid. I thought, “He’s going over.” And there he is. He’s standing up on the guardrail, and I’m going, “We’ve got to slow down, guys. We’ve got to take a break,” you know? “We have to get back to reality here. It’s just a movie.” But at the time, it’s not. When it’s all over with, you can say that. You can go, “It’s just a movie.” But while you’re doing it, it’s not just a movie, you know? We just did some insane stuff.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Production designer Jackson De Govia.

**JACKSON DE GOVIA**

One reason that the crane, the little yellow-and-black crane, is so incredibly vivid was because it was delivered to the set, you know, like, about a couple of hours before it was going to be shot. So, we didn’t have time to do weathering and all that kind of stuff to make it look real. It really stood out, I thought, and that turned out to be a virtue. Because it was, like, you know, “Here it comes. Watch this thing.” And then all of a sudden, it’s ripped off and falling down the shaft and all of that kind of stuff. I think it’s OK. It’s like, you want to surprise people, but you also want to make them fear what they’re about to see. You want to make them nervous.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

You remember what happens next. Payne hears Jack securing the winch hook to the elevator and...

**[SPEED CLIP]**

**DENNIS HOPPER (“as Howard Payne”)**

Don’t fuck with daddy.

**[BEEPS]**

**[EXPLOSION]**

**KRIS TAPLEY**

He blows the emergency brakes. But, lo and behold, Jack’s idea works! For the time being. The winch hook is holding the elevator. Let’s get back to the actors as we’re almost at the point of rescue. Here’s Michael Fujimoto again.

**MICHAEL FUJIMOTO**

When the back door of the elevator blew up, I don’t know if we got a warning for that. But that was, like, you know, I mean, kind of hairy, because I think I remember a lot of air pressure, air, and then I guess it turned out to be, like, pieces of Styrofoam. But that was kind of hairy when they made the explosion, but it was just all this big, pressurized air and little debris flying everywhere and stuff like that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Another actor in there is Paige Goodman, “Elevator Passenger #4.” Paige’s character is the one whose legs go falling through the hole in the floor of the elevator after Payne blows the brakes. Those were a stunt person’s actual legs, to be clear, but let’s get Paige’s voice in here as she did have some elements to shoot with that stunt.

**PAIGE GOODMAN**

My part of the legs dangling, I think it was, like, stationary. I can’t remember. I might have – now I’m thinking, did I have, like, some type – not a harness, but something. There was something, I recall, was, like, keeping me in there. But it didn’t drop when I was in it and legs dangling. It was shot like it had already fallen, you know? And, you know, I remember that we shot that a few times with people trying to pull me out.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Here’s Susan Barnes talking about her big moment that Jan carved out for her where she gets scared and then finally reaches out for Jack to start pulling her up.

**SUSAN BARNES**

We came up with this bit. After the first day, the costumer went to Jan and the producers and said, “We have to pad her because all across her abdomen is bruised very badly.” Because they kept smacking me against the bottom of the elevator. Everybody thought I was fat, but I was padded. People back here, and they’re my friends, are going, “Oh, you gained a little weight,” because they padded me up after they realized that I was being banged against the bottom of the elevator every time they pulled me up.

**PAIGE GOODMAN**

I mean, it's a story I'm going to tell all the time, like, "Yeah, no big deal. Keanu Reeves pulled me out of an elevator." It's just such a funny thing, right? Especially if I did not continue on with that, so, it's like my one little – you know, I'll be on a job now as a producer, and someone will mention that I was in that movie, and people will start looking it up on their phone and trying to find, you know, that clip or whatever.

**PATRICK FISCHLER**

They were really pulling us through this small space. That's the kind of stuff that Jan does, is he creates an adrenaline that is real. You don't need it, because we're actors, but, you know, it helps for those who can't get there. So, I do remember, like, the space was tight and, you know, having that panic of, like, "Wait, I don't want them to shift this thing when I'm coming through it." But I love rollercoasters. I love rides. So, for me, all of that kind of stuff was fun. But I could see, if my memory's correct, some people on the elevator, it freaked them out in a negative way.

**PAIGE GOODMAN**

There was one girl who, later, she was upset because there's a shot where she's getting pulled out or in or something and her skirt went up a little bit, and they kept that. You know, like, that was part of the, you know, the final cut. I remember her being really irritated about that.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

OK, everyone is safe and running down the hall. Susan loses her shoe here, you remember that? That actually happened by accident on one of the takes and they ran with it.

**SUSAN BARNES**

Literally, I yelled out, "My shoe!" And they said, "Yeah, use the shoe bit." You know, I was the lady that wouldn't get out of the elevator who lost her shoe. And I will tell you that some fans and then friends from childhood, I would get a box with one shoe in it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Jack and Harry breathe a sigh of relief. But then, Jack has another of his epiphanies.

**[SPEED CLIP]**

**KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")**

He's here.

**JEFF DANIELS (as "Harry Temple")**

He could have blown that thing from Pacoima.

**KEANU REEVES (as "Jack Traven")**

No, he knew we were up to something. He's close by.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

And indeed, off to the freight elevators they go. Here's stunt coordinator Gary Hymes.

## **GARY HYMES**

There was another moment with Keanu and I said, "Would you be comfortable jumping to the cable from the opening?" Now, he's on a cable and I have him. You know, he's not going to fall. And he just looks at me and goes, "I don't think I can do this, Gary." And I'm, like, "Keanu, I would never ask you to do anything I knew you couldn't do." And he just looked at me and goes, "OK." And of course, he nailed it. And then afterwards, he goes, "Oh, that was easy." And I said, "Keanu, please stay this humble."

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

Jack slides down the cable as Harry climbs down the shaft and this is where they engage Payne down in the freight elevator. You'll see a couple of shots that look down the shaft from this perspective. I might as well talk a little bit about visual effects here, so let me introduce you to the film's visual effects supervisor, Boyd Shermis. We'll hear a lot more from him in the next couple of episodes, so this is just a quick hit for this part of the sequence.

## **BOYD SHERMIS**

We did a painted backing, a sort of old-school painted backing, so that when you're looking down, it was sort of a fixed forced perspective on the elevator shaft. So, you're looking down, and the elevator car is 10 feet off the ground, if that, but it's sitting on a painted backing, much as like a cyc that you might have done in the old days, in old Hollywood. It was painted to the perspective of being 40 feet in the air looking down an elevator shaft at a 40-degree angle. So, that was a very old-school technique that Jan wanted to do, because a) it was cheaper. And he shot a number of movies using that kind of gag and he was comfortable and confident he could pull off a handful of shots.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

Speak of the devil, director Jan de Bont.

## **JAN DE BONT**

It's one of the few times that we had to use visual effects. Actually, not really visual effects. They're on-set effects, where you paint the background to a perspective that you've already pre-set. So, I look through the camera, the lens, you have to be a 50mm, and the lights that mount on the real set have to be, then, continued onto the painting as well, so you get the really right perspective, and that's really hard to achieve. Because you see the lights that are there on the side, and then, to continue that, you have to get little – the first couple are tiny, tiny, little light effects, real lights. And then as they – deeper down, of course, there's no space. Then they become, like, painted light effects. And to get it all lined up, it's really hard, and if you make one mistake with the camera, it's immediately clear it's fake.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

Production designer Jackson De Govia.

## **JACKSON DE GOVIA**

It gets confused down there but it looks deeper than it actually is and that was a fantastic effect.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

We might as well hear from gaffer Chris Strong as well.

## **CHRIS STRONG**

We tried to do as much as we could off of practicals, and there was really nowhere to hide any lights. So, I mean, we had stuff from up above going down, and at times, if you didn't see the bottom, we'd have something down there bouncing, just coming up, just to give the ambience. But it was mainly just the practicals on the sides and in the top.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

By the way, remember in this sequence after Harry falls down into the freight elevator with Payne and then Payne makes the elevator start going up and Jack is sort of stuck there, riding it to the roof? Those shots of Keanu riding the elevator are the only blue screen shots in the entire movie. Here's Boyd Shermis again.

## **BOYD SHERMIS**

We still did, in a handful of shots, a bit of blue screen, of Keanu riding on the elevator car, into which we would composite the miniature background. But again, that miniature today would have been a 3D background. But I'll argue that we probably almost assuredly would have done more blue-screen work and less of that sort of painted backing gag that we did for the elevator shaft. You know, people are pretty quick to just say, "Oh, you know, I'll just throw up a blue and we'll shoot it on blue." And, you know, once again, for time and for budget and any number of other reasons, you know, we opted not to do blue screen on those handful of shots and instead did the painted backing. So, those are things you just wouldn't do today, I don't think.

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

So, just a bit of a peek inside the craft of all of that. There's plenty more to discuss about that miniature and how the future met the past in the hybrid effects quality of the film in due course. But for now, Jack jumps down into the elevator and it's a stand-off.

## **[SPEED CLIP]**

### **DENNIS HOPPER (as "Howard Payne")**

Hold it! Pop quiz, hotshot! Terrorist holding a police hostage. He's got enough dynamite strapped to his chest to blow a building in half. Now what do you do?

## **KRIS TAPLEY**

And then...

## **[SPEED CLIP]**

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

Give it up! You’ve got nowhere to go!

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

Shoot the hostage.

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Say goodbye, Harry.

**[GUNSHOT]**

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

You fuck.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That’s right, Jack hauled off and shot the fucking hostage. And both of those lines, “pop quiz, hotshot” and “shoot the hostage,” would instantly find their place in pop culture.

**JEFF DANIELS**

I wish I’d known before I said the line. “Jan, I just wanted to point out that this probably, decades from now, will be, like, one of the lines in pop culture. I’m just saying, before I say it, just, let’s all acknowledge the fact that this is going to, you know, go way beyond what we’re doing today.” No idea. You know, Bogey, “Here’s looking at you, kid.” “Start of a beautiful friendship.” Whatever he says at the end of *Casablanca*. Maybe they know. Certainly, if it’s placed at the end of a movie or something, you might go, “Yeah, this might be one of those that, you know, maybe.” So many other things have to happen. It has to be a hit. The movie has to be good. You have to be good in it. So many things factor into those things that rise up. “I’m shaving,” in *Dumb and Dumber*, I think, will be on my tombstone. The other one’s *Gettysburg*, where I scream “bayonets.” That, I knew. That, when we were doing it, I’m going – because I knew he was pushing in. You know, “Here I come.” I knew that was, “Let him land, ‘bayonets,’ and just from your fucking toes, just let it come out,” and “cut,” and you put the music under it. Yep. Yep. No, but “pop quiz, hotshot,” no, I didn’t see that coming.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Jack gets blown away by the force of the bomb. There was some wire removal there with visual effects, which is standard practice today. Not so much then. And, voila, the elevator sequence comes to a close. We’re going to be saying goodbye to the elevator folk after this so let’s have them start to wind us down. Here’s Susan Barnes.

**SUSAN BARNES**

*Speed*, the gift that keeps on giving. The bigger the hit, the more the residuals. So, it was a huge hit. So, I mean, I’ve just had really good residuals for years. I mean, since it hit TV that year. I’m never surprised when I open a residual and it’s *Speed*. Never. People still love it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Paige Goodman.

**PAIGE GOODMAN**

To this day, I still get residuals. Like, every once in a while, I get a check for, like, 18 cents or \$17. Like, it's super random and I just laugh, you know? So, yeah, it's great.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Patrick Fischler.

**PATRICK FISCHLER**

He made an incredible movie. *Speed* is an incredible film. I haven't seen it in a long time, but every single one of my friends who have kids show it to their kids, and then they text me, they're, like, "Holy shit. You're in *Speed*!" Like, everyone forgets I'm in *Speed*. They send the same screenshot of me looking up in the elevator. But I remember going to opening weekend at the Mann's Chinese and I took my dad, who's, like, a movie lover, who passed away a couple years after *Speed*, but I remember both of us – actually, the first time I went with my group of friends, like a midnight show at the Mann's Chinese that opening Friday night, and we freaked out. We were, like, "Holy shit. This movie's incredible." And that was the first time, also, people were, like, "Wait, were you just in a movie?" Like, looking, "Were you that guy in that movie?" And then I took my dad the following week to see it, because I was, like – I felt proud. Like, "Look I'm in a movie, man!" And, you know, he loved it. So, my memories of *Speed* are so fond, you know? And of how good the movie turned out, and how sort of special it is, and it's held up. It's not easy for action movies to hold up. It really isn't.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And Richard Gelb.

**RICHARD GELB**

I'll say this, and you may not believe it, but I went to the premiere and when I saw it, I thought, "Wow, they made this amazing movie and I'm glad I was in the elevator." About a day or two after it opened, I was with my wife. We went to breakfast at Campanile on La Brea. I don't think it's there anymore. I'm not making this up. The maitre d is seating us and he looked, he does a double take on me and says, "Hey, you're the guy in the elevator." I mean, if you blink, you will not see me. So, people really watch movies closely.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And with that, I just want to mention a few things about these folks to close. Richard, who we just heard from, co-created a game during the pandemic called Polarized. It's like a game night kind of thing where you have to argue risky or dangerous topics, but you don't get to choose the side you're on. The idea is, you know, we're so polarized about various topics in society today that sometimes those Thanksgiving dinners can be awkward, so this is a way to have fun with all of that. Paige, meanwhile, produces a



podcast called *American Glutton* with her friend, actor Ethan Suplee. You might remember him from stuff like *Remember the Titans* and TV's *My Name is Earl*. He was the big guy who was Jason Lee's buddy. Well, he's absolutely shredded now and that podcast follows his health and weight loss journey. Patrick is doing his thing. He's been on stuff like *Billions* and *The Lincoln Lawyer* and *Barry* lately. Just keeps working. Susan has left acting and lives on the Monongahela River in southwestern Pennsylvania these days, which sounds lovely. Michael would appear to have left acting and background work behind as well, and CeCe Tsou is the manager of Xi'an restaurant out here in Beverly Hills. So, if you ever pop in, say hello.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

There's a bit more to be said about the elevator sequence, but as I said, I think we can hold off for that visual effects episode when we start detailing the post-production phase next month. For now, we still have third act to knock out.

### **[OUTRO MUSIC]**

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Next week on 50 MPH...

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Finally, we come to the third act of *Speed*, a subway finale built with a number of old-school film techniques.

### **IAN FAILES**

It's one of those situations in movies where you know it's a model, but you're OK with it. In fact, the reason it works is because it's a bit of everything. And because it's an action film, it all goes together so quickly. And in fact, if it was manicured too much, it wouldn't suit the grittiness of *Speed*.

### **DAVE DRZEWIECKI**

Just asking him questions about, "Well, if you were going to shoot this, you know, for real, how would you do it," you know? And then you sort of take those ideas and you scale them down.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

But it's a race against the clock as suddenly, the film has a fast-approaching early summer release date.

### **MICHAEL SAJBEL**

A real tough lady at 20th Century Fox called us and said, "You no longer have a personal life. You are going to work every day to the point of exhaustion, until you are done."

### **BOYD SHERMIS**

At a certain point the studio just didn't care about the money. They were backing up the Brinks truck and handing us wads of money just to make sure it got done on time.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website [50MPHpodcast.com](http://50MPHpodcast.com). If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.