

## 50 MPH: EPISODE 41

### “THE FALLOUT OF A PHENOMENON”

Transcript (00:22:45)



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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**

For the last nine months we have detailed the conception, development, production, post-production, release and legacy of *Speed*. Today, we have a bit of a transitional episode before we move into the home stretch of *50 MPH*. And that is a focus on the fallout of *Speed*. I thought it would be fun to just look at what this movie and its impact in the industry meant for its various players. Let’s start at the very top with director Jan de Bont. Remember, Jan was a bit of risk for Fox here. Although he was a celebrated cinematographer, prior to *Speed*, he was completely unproven as a director. He even bombed in his initial meeting with the studio. So, he comes out of this thing with a totally fresh coat of paint and a new lease on his career. At 50 years old! Here’s Jan.

**JAN DE BONT**

The good thing was that the other studios knew me from a lot of other movies, and so, they kind of opened their eyes a little bit, but they still didn’t know, you know, like, “Is this a real thing?” Until they saw the numbers come in. So, when they realized that, and they’re still making money off that movie, it is kind of amazing that it took them a while to really make the next step or to offer me something.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Of course, we all know the offer that did finally come: the tornado-chaser adventure *Twister*, starring Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt. We talked about *Twister* quite a bit several months ago with film critic Bilge Ebiri, but I’ve always loved this movie. And it was a hell of a follow-up to a surprise success like *Speed*. The film dropped on May 10, 1996 and ultimately pulled in \$495 million at the box office.

**JAN DE BONT**

*Twister* came along almost accidentally, you know? It’s like, somebody gave me the script and I read it, and I said, “Oh, well” – I kind of felt that, it’s like, a movie like that has to be treated almost in a similar way visually. Not like a Hitchcock movie with all that stuff, but it had to be a lot more realism in it, and also a young cast and no big-name actors. And I think that really made a huge difference, that when I told that to Spielberg and to Kathy, they liked it, but they only liked it, I think, because of *Speed*. If I would

have been there the first time and would have made that same proposal, they wouldn't be so sure, because they wouldn't be sure if that could be made, either. Nobody really, really wanted to make that movie, either, because it was so complicated.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

He's talking about Steven Spielberg and Kathleen Kennedy there, who produced *Twister* through Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment. We've heard a couple of folks take credit for bringing Jan into that fold. Stunt coordinator Gary Hymes, remember, said he had been under contract with Spielberg when he came aboard *Speed* and that he sort of gave the acclaimed filmmaker his own vote of confidence for Jan after working with him. You'll also recall producers Walter Parkes and Laurie Macdonald, who were brought in to oversee Joss Whedon's rewrite of *Speed*. Their next gig after *Speed* was actually running Amblin, so they obviously had a huge hand in bringing Jan in. Now, as I hear it, there could easily be a podcast in the making of *Twister*, as in many ways, it was an even more harrowing adventure than *Speed*. But I'll leave that to others. I will say that I love the fact that Jan saw leading-man potential in Bill Paxton. And who doesn't love Philip Seymour Hoffman in that movie? There's a guy who had range. It's also one of my dad's favorite movies, so, I'll always love it. Of course, Jan went on from there to... another movie in 1997. We'll get there. Then *The Haunting* in 1999. His final film as a director was *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life* in 2003, and unfortunately, we never got another Jan de Bont experience on screen. But I'm always holding out hope. Let's move over to screenwriter Graham Yost. Obviously, *Speed* changed his entire life. He had been toiling away in the TV writers' room landscape on stuff like *Hey Dude!* and *Full House*. After *Speed*, he was officially the writer of an Oscar-winning box office hit. That changes things. His very next project after *Speed* was *Broken Arrow*, starring John Travolta and Christian Slater from director John Woo. He had already made a deal for that one, resulting from his by-then years-long partnership in the trenches with producer Mark Gordon developing *Speed*. Let me hand it over to Graham, and we've heard a little bit of this before on the podcast but it's obviously relevant here.

### **GRAHAM YOST**

I think we were already embarked on *Broken Arrow* by that point, but that then bumped up, you know? That became less of a problem. And then we sold *Hard Rain*, then called *The Flood*, at Paramount, and, you know, my joke was, "Yeah, us going back to Paramount after they put *Speed* into turnaround? You know, if we said we wanted to make a movie about a dog with fleas, they would have gone, 'Absolutely.'" And that didn't turn out great. It's a good movie. It lacks what *Speed* had. And when I ran into Morgan Freeman years later, I said, "Morgan, I'm Graham Yost. I wrote *Hard Rain*." He looked at me and he said, "Eighty-eight days underwater." But it let me write features and do re-writes for the next five years, six years, really right through *The Last Castle*, which was 2000, 2001. But around that time, I was getting back into TV. I worked on *From the Earth to the Moon* in '96, '97 and got to direct, and then *Band of Brothers* in '99, 2000. And then, you know, my career has been TV ever since, pretty much.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Indeed, that TV career has included everything from HBO's John Adams miniseries to *The Pacific*, *Falling Skies*, *Justified*, *Sneaky Pete*, *The Americans*, *Slow Horses* and, most recently, Apple TV's *Silo*.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Speaking a moment ago of producer Mark Gordon, *Speed* certainly put him on the map in a big way. He moved on to the romantic comedy *A Pyromaniac's Love Story* after *Speed*, as well as *Broken Arrow* and *Hard Rain*, with Graham. Most notably in that immediate wake was *Saving Private Ryan*, which actually arose out of the experience he had developing *Speed* for a time with Don Granger at Paramount. Remember that? Here's Mark reflecting on the *Speed* afterglow.

### **MARK GORDON**

First of all, it was the first big movie, and again, for me at the time, that was a big movie. I hadn't done anything like that, of that scale, and so the whole experience of it was great, you know, up until when it wasn't great. I really, really love the movie. I think it's a terrific film. Graham Yost and Ian Bryce are two of my closest friends. So, both of them came out of the relationship that we had on that film. And to be a part of something that endures the test of time, it's really wonderful to be a part of it.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Mark's career has been vast and varied ever since, including smaller prestige films like *Talk to Me*, *The Messenger* and *Steve Jobs*, massive blockbusters like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *10,000 BC* and *2012* and, most especially, a TV empire that includes series like *Grey's Anatomy*, *Criminal Minds* and *Ray Donovan*. Now, Mark mentioned his friendship with Ian Bryce there. Talk about a guy who took off like a rocket after *Speed*. The film would be Ian's last as a unit production manager as he was ready to level up to full-on producing, and the next few steps after *Speed* would be with some of the folks he worked with on the project. The first would be *Twister* with Jan, then *Hard Rain* and *Saving Private Ryan* with Graham and Mark, and then *Forces of Nature*, with Sandra Bullock. After that he did Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous* and Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* before becoming Michael Bay's producer on films like *The Island*, the *Transformers* movies, *6 Underground* and *Ambulance*, among others. Here's Ian.

### **IAN BRYCE**

I think, like, again, when I say it moved people's careers, it helped move mine, right? And, you know, I would get calls and it's like, "Oh, the guy who did *Speed*, let's get him." And so, I just started, you know, line producing at that time and I line produced for quite a few years before I was able to segue also into creative producing as well, but I didn't want to be doing all those nuts and bolts, right? I had done it for several years and I felt like that was like an opportunity for me to move up, and the next movie was *Twister*, right? And so, Jan, he had some power and we were able to say, "Look, I'll come and produce the movie" – I mean, with Kathy, obviously, and a group. But, you know, then we had a production manager at that point. Because the movie was complicated enough that it warranted, you know, having two people. So, that was the beginning of how I started moving in a slightly different direction.

## KRIS TAPLEY

Just to mention some of the rest of the top-line crew and their immediate fallout, cinematographer Andrzej Bartkowiak moved on to three films after *Speed*, all in 1995: *Losing Isaiah*, *Species* and *Jade*. He followed that up with Barbra Streisand's *The Mirror Has Two Faces* in 1996, and in 1997, the volcano actioner *Dante's Peak* with Pierce Brosnan, as well as *The Devil's Advocate* with his *Speed* buddy Keanu Reeves. Production designer Jackson De Govia extended his "Messenger of Peace" cinematic universe to *Die Hard with a Vengeance* after this, before working on *Multiplicity* and *Volcano*. Costume designer Ellen Mirojnick moved on to Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* in 1995 and continued her ongoing collaboration with Paul Verhoeven on *Showgirls*, *Starship Troopers* and *Hollow Man*. She also did *Twister* and *The Haunting* with Jan. Most recently, she landed her first Oscar nomination earlier this year for Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*! Congrats to her on that, by the way. Film editor John Wright also worked on *Broken Arrow*, and he continued his John McTieman collaboration on movies like *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior*. And finally, composer Mark Mancina was in high demand on movies like *Bad Boys*, *Assassins*, *Fair Game* and *Money Train* before working with Jan again on *Twister*. His Lion King/Disney roots kept him in the mix on animated films, too, like *Tarzan*, *Brother Bear* and *Moana*. Alright, so what about the actors? Keanu Reeves had his entire world turned upside down by *Speed*, and as I discussed with author Alex Pappademas several months ago, it's probably a movie and a surrounding fandom that bewilders him to this day. The first thing he did after *Speed* was retreat to Canada for an exclusive engagement as Hamlet on stage. Here's what Alex, probably one of the foremost authorities on the actor, had to say about that when we spoke.

## ALEX PAPPADEMAS

It's this weird homecoming. He goes to Canada. He goes to Winnipeg, of all places. Like, there is apparently the option on the table to do, like, a big sort of, like, New York kind of debut, like, some kind of thing that would be very high-profile. And he chooses not to do that. He chooses to do it almost in a place that's, like, hard to get to. Like, it's not – people go anyway, and, like, obsessive Keanu fans show up and, like, the run sells out, the whole thing. But he's trying to do something that's away from all of this craziness. It's this lifelong dream because he's, like, a Shakespeare guy, but it's also an escape hatch from everything that is happening. And it's a thing to – like, to go and do this at this moment, rather than kind of striking while the iron is hot with whatever, you know, kind of thing you're going to go and do is, I think, a calculated decision. And I think it's an attempt to kind of bring the temperature down on everything and kind of postpone, again, the question of what he's going to go and do.

## KRIS TAPLEY

Then came *Johnny Mnemonic*, which was sort of altered in the wake of *Speed* and made into more of a, quote, "Keanu Reeves movie." There were little things like *A Walk in the Clouds*, *Feeling Minnesota* and *The Last Time I Committed Suicide*, but probably the most *Speed*-influenced offer that crossed his agent's desk at this time was 1996's *Chain Reaction*. But, of course, everything in the '90s was leading to *The Matrix* in

1999, and today, he's the action superstar that *Speed* paved the way for as the central figure in the *John Wick* franchise. What else can we really say about Keanu Reeves at this point? Anyway, go back and listen to that episode with me and Alex walking you through the man's life and times, episode nine. It's good stuff. Sandra Bullock. She came out of *Speed* with a full-blown starring vehicle in *The Net*, before moving on to romance territory with movies like *Two If by Sea*, *In Love and War*, *Hope Floats*, *Forces of Nature* and more. Joel Schumacher's *A Time to Kill* was in there, and of course, *Miss Congeniality* would take her to massive new heights. Later in her career, she would scoop up an Oscar for *The Blind Side* and star in her biggest hit ever, *Gravity*, and she still commands an audience, witnessed by the way her Netflix films *Bird Box* and *The Unforgivable* perform on that streaming service and the turnout for *The Lost City* in 2022. But the point is, *Speed* set her on this course. As I've said, she was the film's star-is-born moment, and perhaps the film's most indelible legacy. Go back and listen to me and *IndieWire*'s Kate Erbland in episode 11 take you on a crash course in Sandra Bullock if you want to hear more. I think Kate put a pretty fine point on Sandra's *Speed*-induced ascendancy at the time.

### **KATE ERBLAND**

And then, all of a sudden, it's like, she's a movie star. She's, like, a fully-formed movie star. And it's not just, "Oh, she's great at this." All of a sudden, she's also a really great business person. But all of a sudden, she is rocketed into the upper echelon of not just female movie stars, but Hollywood movie stars.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Then there's Jeff Daniels. As we've discussed previously, Jeff really saw his career turn around in 1994. It was the one-two punch of *Speed* and *Dumb and Dumber* that did it. You've heard this clip before but it's worth pulling it back in. Here's Jeff talking about this whirlwind moment that happened for him 30 years ago.

### **JEFF DANIELS**

We started shooting *Dumb and Dumber*, Colorado, and I remember in May, Jim went to Cannes over the weekend, and then flew back after having seen *The Mask* premiere at Cannes, and it exploded. And then we finished shooting, I think, in June, right when *Speed* is coming out. And I'm just in that, you know? It's Sandy and it's Keanu and it's Dennis Hopper. I'm just in it. And that's a huge hit. And then I get into the fall, and then now we're doing promotion for *Dumb and Dumber*, which is being released in December. And the reviews were atrocious. And we're the number one movie in the country for six weeks. And *Speed* had just happened in the summer and that had been a big hit, and now here in December, you're in another big hit, and now you're hosting *Saturday Night Live* in January. In one year, that was a big, big turnaround. And it wouldn't have worked had I not done *Dumb and Dumber*, if I'd not worked with Jim and across from Jim, you know, a comedic genius, and held my own, plus *Speed*. As Nicholson said, "You just bought yourself five years," you know? So, that happened.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Jeff came out of *Speed* and into stuff like *Fly Away Home*, *2 Days in the Valley* and *101 Dalmatians*, really flexing his range, which was the goal of taking on *Speed* and *Dumb and Dumber* in the first place. He would go on to work with directors like Clint Eastwood, Stephen Daldry, Noah Baumbach, George Clooney, Sam Mendes, Rian Johnson, Danny Boyle and Ridley Scott, while picking up Emmy Awards for his performances in HBO's *The Newsroom* and Netflix's *Godless*. Finally, rounding out our key players, Dennis Hopper sort of collected his paycheck for *Speed* and then went back to his working-class-actor ways. As author Mark Harris and I discussed back in episode 15, that is who he was throughout his career. There were one or two renaissances, but never any big switchbacks that threw him onto a new course. He came out of *Speed* playing the villain in *Waterworld* and dug back into the indie world with movies like *Basquiat* and *The Last Days of Frankie the Fly* and a whole bunch of films you've never heard of. His last significant gig was the television series *Crash*, taking off from the Oscar-winning film, in 2008. He passed away in 2010, but the legacy he left is one of a trailblazer and an icon, which is the aura he took with him into *Speed* that elevated the material that much more. Go back and listen to me and Mark dig in on that career because it was a busy one. And just to mention some of the other cast, Alan Ruck parlayed this into *Twister* with Jan again and, most especially, a running gig in TV's *Spin City*, among many other series appearances. His biggest TV success, however, was still to come as he picked up an Emmy nomination last year for HBO's hit drama *Succession*. Congrats to him. Joe Morton went on to, well, you name it. Just go check out his IMDb page. His most notable work would come on television in series like *Law & Order*, *E-Ring*, *The Good Wife*, *Eureka* and *Scandal*, which landed him an Emmy Award. Glenn Plummer, like Ellen Mirojnick, moved on to *Strange Days* and *Showgirls* after *Speed*. Beth Grant, funnily enough, had a role in *City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold*, which opened the same day as *Speed*. So, that must have been a fun weekend for her. Hawthorne James went on to roles in David Fincher's *Seven* and Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*, among others. I group them together as emblematic of pretty much this entire cast, which is full of working actors who continue to ply their trade doing what they love across a wide spectrum of film, television and even video games. Let's hear from Glenn, though, because he found *Speed* to be a considerable breath of fresh air in the final analysis.

### **GLENN PLUMMER**

I mean, *Speed* was my crossover film. I left all that gang shit alone, and then I did *Speed*. Then I did *Showgirls*, *Up Close and Personal*, *Strange Days*. That was the one. It set me up. "Oh, he's good in big movies." So, they just came along, all these big movies came – I mean, you know, it gave me the opportunity to be in bigger films, much bigger films, you know? *The Substitute* came after that where I played a teacher. The roles became much more diverse than that bad guy over there with a gun, going to jail, you know? Because that's what I was doing before that. That bad guy, over there, with a gun, going to jail. That's what I was doing. I didn't want to do that anymore, so I changed my hair, changed my image and became something else.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

So, that about covers it. I sort of just wanted to skip a stone across this immediate fallout, even if it wasn't likely to be a long episode, because I think it deserves its own space. After all, *Speed* is a film that transformed a number of careers and it's worth pointing out those trajectories. However, one of the biggest pieces fallout from *Speed* would come three years after the film's release, and I'm afraid it's time we finally faced it.

## **[OUTRO MUSIC]**

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Next week on *50 MPH...*

### **RISA BRAMON GARCIA**

Don't ask me why we ever made *Speed 2*. That was just the stupidest movie on the planet.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

That's right, we come to it at last. The account of *Speed*'s disastrous 1997 sequel, *Speed 2: Cruise Control*.

### **KEANU REEVES**

When I read the script, it just didn't deliver. I felt like a film called *Speed*, on an ocean liner, was counterintuitive.

### **JOE MORTON**

I said, "I'll do it, but I don't want my name on the credits."

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Those involved and those who dodged a bullet recall one of Hollywood's all-time biggest blunders.

### **MARK GORDON**

I was invited off of *Speed 2*. He went to the studio and said, "I don't want to work with this producer."

### **MARK MANCINA**

I was in this weird place because I love Jan and he gave me my break, so I wasn't going to say, "No, I'm not doing it."

### **GLENN PLUMMER**

Honestly, my character didn't need to be in the movie. The movie was over when the boat hit the island.

### **GRAHAM YOST**

And a carload of people in a convertible go by and they say, "Don't see it! It sucks!"



**JAN DE BONT**

We did the best we could.

**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.