

# Eric Jacobus and Clayton Barber: The Action Flix Exclusive Interview



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Tuesday, March 07, 2017

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## BLINDSIDED

Check out the new short film *Blindsided* from Eric Jacobus and Clayton Barber here: <https://youtu.be/Q-xOaU4I8Ys>

If you're a fan of independent action cinema, then chances are you know Eric Jacobus and Clayton Barber. Both men have cut their teeth in the stuntman department in action films for several years now and have served as fight choreographers and action directors in the action genre. Eric created his group The Stunt People back in 2001 as a way to infuse Jackie Chan style Hong Kong cinema action into mainstream America. His action group has made numerous action short films and feature length films since.



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Clayton Barber was a champion competitor in the martial arts for years and has worked on several films as an action director and choreographer just recently working on the movie Creed with

Sylvester Stallone.

In their first interview with Action-Flix.com, the two talk to us about the industry, making action movies the indie way and their new short film Blindsided that just debuted on YouTube and is the talk of the town.

1) Action Flix: Since this is your first interview with our site, tell our readers a little bit about yourself.

Eric Jacobus: Sure! I was a weightlifter and gymnast for many years and when I was 18, I discovered Jackie Chan films. I decided to drop all my academics at the time and pursue what I loved which was filmmaking.

Clayton Barber: I've been a stuntman for about 23 years now and before that I was a Tae Kwon Do champion competitor and martial artist. For the last 23 years, I've built up a career being a stuntman and fight co-ordinator and I've moved into action directing and producing.

2) Action Flix: Eric, you created your stunt group, The Stunt People, back in 2001. Can you tell us how that all came about and how has it evolved over the years?

Eric: We created The Stunt People as a way to re-enact the Hong Kong action genre into mainstream America, We were looking at Hong Kong films like Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung that we really loved and we wanted to understand how they created the action that they did. We wanted to create it on an Indie level and it really was just a bunch of guys sort of reverse engineering Hong Kong Films and seeing how they shot and edited them and how they made action really work. We then made a model and found a bunch of people and we made a lot of films throughout the years. We've had a pretty good run and now it's all archived and we are very proud of that history and what we have done.

3) Action Flix: Can you tell us how you two met?

Clayton: I met Eric through a mutual friend of ours named J.J. Perry and he introduced me to Eric and I was really intrigued and enamored by what he was doing on an indie level. I thought he had great talent and desire to perform, act and construct his own action scenes and he was very serious about the game. So I said to myself, I want to meet this guy so I flew out to San Francisco and I called him up and said I want to meet you. We met and we talked for hours about cinema, action and life and I just realized that he had something special, very special, A that pint in my career, I wanted to produce and the best way to make that connection was to find somebody else who had interests like me. Eric was one of the leaders in the indie action movement and he was exploding on the scene so I just sort of gravitated towards him and I really like his desire to go to the next level in the action genre.

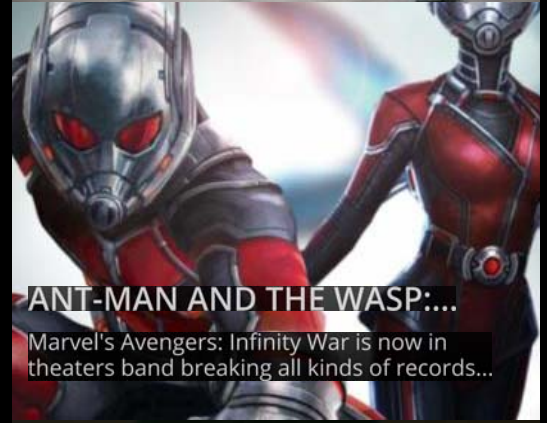
Eric: If I can add to that, one thing I was really fortunate to learn from Clayton was how important story was to action films which is what a lot of us were overlooking at the time. We were just focusing on the action scenes in Hong Kong films. When I met Clayton, he was a producer and he was producing a lot at the time and he introduced me to the idea of how story should drive the action and not the other way around. He changed how I was crafting my films and that's what ultimately bridged us together.

4) Action Flix: Your first collaboration was the two short films, Rope-A-Dope 1 and 2. Can you tell us how that project came about?

Clayton: Yeah, it was after a few talks that Eric and I had and we were trying to collaborate and we had thrown around a lot of ideas over a period of time and finally I said let's create something simple. I said let's do something simplistic around a hook and kind of marry the genre with the mainstream. Coming from the Indie level, I was like let's create a fight around Groundhog's Day and Eric said "Yes let's do it!" From then on, we started collaborating on how we would approach it and we got various people to help us with our adjective.

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5) Action Flix: You two have since created your production company which is called Jacobus/Barber (JB) Productions. Tell us how that came about and what can we expect from that venture.

Eric: We really wanted to create a production company that dignified sort of the new angle we were taking independent action films which was taking the indie spirit and combining it with very strong, deep story telling. I think that's the ultimate combination of forces for the two of us. Clayton also brings a lot of stunt experience and he really understands directing action and the market very well. With Rope-a-Dope 1 and 2, we were sort of finding that relationship and when Clayton was going to direct Blindsided, that was when we realized what the partnership really was. That's sort of the model going into the future which is Clayton directing and both of us creating stories and developing the action films that resolve around strong stories.

Clayton: Again, that's why I gravitated towards Eric and what he was doing on an indie level. He is making an impact and a mark and not just doing moves but he is very adamant about the performance part. Eric is an established writer, director and actor himself and at the time when I met him, I was trying to produce and I realized this guy was on to something. He is very serious about leaving behind a mark and what really inspired me to collaborate with him was I found someone as serious as I was about doing something. We all come from the indie world and that mindset but what we wanted to do was graduate from a white belt to a yellow belt and take it to the next level.

6) Action Flix: Now Clayton, this is your first time behind the director's chair. How was that for you being the first time you directed a film?

Clayton: I guess it was a natural thing in a way because no matter what I was trying to do in the stunt co-ordinator world, I had also been an action director and a 2nd unit director before. As a producer, it was always frustrating for me because I couldn't find anybody who wanted to create the stories that Eric and I wanted to make. We would always talk and say that we want to do this and we would try to find directors who would do our vision but then we realized it was him and I that that were doing our vision. So I said I'll stop producing and I'll direct because it was one of those things that was like lets do this and do it right and that's how it came about. It was no one could really execute our vision that we wanted to do and we were right there doing what we wanted to do and we just went from there.

7) Action Flix: That leads me to my next question, Eric, you normally direct the films you do, How was it to take a back seat and let Clayton direct Blindsided?

Eric: I had all the confidence in the world in Clayton and that was confirmed with Blindsided. In the past, I worked with a lot of directors that are very visually oriented or even might be too action oriented and they don't focus on the story and they don't delegate. For example, you have directors who just focus on how good the shot looks and they don't care about the performance. I think Clayton is a true director in the sense that he's there to deliver a story which is what a film has to have. Being able to step out of that role, which it's very hard to direct yourself, and be able to trust somebody who can be honest with the performance and who knows exactly what they want was a very liberating experience. It allowed me to try new things out and we would experiment a lot. Things were changing constantly and we have a director who was developing from the very beginning so it's a much deeper relationship. It's deeper than having a director for hire who just comes in, directs and walks away. Clayton is involved in every level and it really is a Clayton J. Barber film because of that. That's why I had so much confidence going in because he had so much vision for the film and it was a great fit.

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from the beginning or it.



8) Action Flix: It seems that a lot of major Hollywood movies don't know how to shoot action. It's all chopped up, heavily edited and shaky. How is it that you guys or a lot of indie filmmakers know how to shoot action and make it exciting for the audience while at the same time being able to see what's going on?

Clayton: Well that's very deliberate. Eric is responsible for a lot of that because we talk a lot about action. We talk a lot about performance. There isn't any camera tricks or shaky camera shots. Because of Eric's background and because he's very serious about creating comedic routines around a gag and making the story the most important part makes it easy for us to get together and say O.K. this is what we want to achieve. We always go for story and character first and then dictate how we do the action. It's not the other way around. we're not saying lets do some cool moves like two guys fighting in the woods or a warehouse vibe. We say no. We say lets create the character, lets create the hook like a good song writer does. They create the hook then they create the verses and the chords around it. We do that with action and we did that with Blindsided. We were always intrigued with portraying a blind character but we didn't know how to do it so we have our references like Blind Fury and Zatoichi. We always thought it would be interesting to tackle that character because of the physicality of it and because of Eric's performance and the way he approaches the character made this the perfect vehicle for us to execute with him.

Eric: Let me just add that Clayton was very adamant about bringing people on who understand action. It's not just the actors who can do stunts but everybody involved is a stuntman even if they don't perform any on camera. All of them are stuntman. Nick Verdi who is a villain in the film is also the cameraman and DP. Our second camera guy was Tim Connelly, our camera operator was David No. Everybody's a stunt man. Even the sound guy is a stunt man. This makes the conversation really easy and it's a simple question to answer. You point the camera and shoot with as little movement as possible. We're not trying to convey emotion. We can all converge on this idea that we want to show the action and it was actually very easy and there was no infighting on that. Everyone was just in it to do a good movie and to do good action.

9) Action Flix: Now I wanted to talk to you about doing comedic films as opposed to serious ones like Dogs of Chinatown and Death Grip. Do you prefer one to the other?

Eric: I think Death Grip is sort of that film that everybody has to get out of their system where they direct a dark, brooding film when they're unemployed. Ultimately, I love the audiences reaction to films like Blindsided and Rope-A-Dope and it's not to say there's no space for a serious film. I think you can still make a crowd pleaser out of a serious film. We gravitate towards comedy because it just feels natural for what we're doing here. There's something vulnerable about comedy as well that we really enjoy. It almost opens up a Pandora's box. Nobody's closed off doing these hardcore fight scenes and we're vulnerable with comedy. It opens up the creativity in a strange way. The Zatoichi character is a natural fit because Zatoichi isn't a serious guy. He's not Daredevil. He's kind of a fun loving, nice guy who messes up sometimes. You know he'll put hot food in his mouth because he likes food but when he's backed into a corner he'll fight and he'll win. He's an interesting character and that's why we gravitated towards that type of character.

10) Action Flix: Clayton, I wanted to ask you about being the stunt coordinator on Creed. How did that come about and what was that like?

Clayton: It was a dream come true because its such an iconic movie. Trying to follow in the footsteps of the Rocky franchise and getting the call to step up to the plate to try to reinvent that or try to hit the statusquo when it comes to Rocky movies. It

was very hard in the beginning but once I dug in and embraced it I realized that story is story, and movement is movement whether you're punching or kicking and I was able to call on my experience within that. I listened to everybody and learned from the best and listened to the masters. Doing that I had a couple conversations with Sylvester Stallone and everybody involved in the previous Rocky movies and I followed their lead. It wasn't my place to reinvent the wheel when it came to Creed but it was my place to try and add a different paint, a different color to it and that came with the inspiration of the director. Like I said, it was a dream come true and a movie I'm very proud of and lucky to have had a chance to participate in.

11) Action Flix: Now you both have done short films and feature length films. Do you prefer one to the other or doesn't it matter?

Clayton: To be honest, we like any film we put down but we're trying to work our way into making feature length films. We do the short content to show what we can do and use it as a platform for us to get better at our craft as story tellers and performers. The short film is the easiest format to do that for. Our intended goal is to ultimately graduate to longer movies and do mainstream features. We want to do the exact same things we are doing on the indie level which is film characters and have a good story and great action to entertain the audience.

12) Action Flix: I wanted to ask you guys about what the challenges of independent film making are?

Eric: I think one of the things that has really changed over the years is the number of other independent film makers out there. One might think that it's difficult to get product out but I actually think it's the opposite. The more people make in movies the better. The difficult part I think is finding the right story and getting a good hook because anybody can make a short film now but it's really about the story and coming up with that initial idea. I mean the masters of cinema have a hard time with coming up with a good script. Scripts can be worked on for 10 to 15 years and these are the masters. On the indie level it's no different.



13) Action Flix: Now lets talk about Blindsided your new short film. How did that project come about? Did you watch Bill Murray in Groundhog's Day and make a karate movie out of it?

Clayton: No not at all (laughs). It was always a hook that we were inspired with to make a story. Eric and I always loved Zatoichi and Blind Fury and thought it would be great to tackle that character. The thing is that Eric kind of personifies that world and that character and it was a natural thing to sort of look at each other and do a 2017 version of the Zatoichi character but in America with our sensibility and our way of telling the character. We didn't have a story, we didn't have any motive other than let's just do an experiment on a character of a blind guy and that's the origin of Blindsided. Eric and I were both working in China on a film called Heart of a Champion. I was the action director and Eric was the fight choreographer and also a camera operator because we needed him for the action. We had just almost completed the film and we said when we get back from China we have to do a really cool film and we decided that the really cool thing to do was the blind character. It all started from we don't have a story but we have a mechanism. We have this guy and that's when we really started to talk and it came to fruition. The story just came from discussions.

