

David Heinz shares surprising facts about *The Call of the Wild*



by Victoria Davis 1 month ago

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Famous for his work on *The Jungle Book* and *Planet of the Apes* franchise, editor David Heinz shares surprising facts and challenges about *The Call of the Wild*, which premieres tomorrow.

In 1903, Jack London wrote one of literature's, arguably, most famous epic adventures, [The Call of the Wild](#). The story is narrated through the eyes of a 140-pound St. Bernard–Scotch Collie mix named Buck who goes from a spoiled Californian pet, to a stolen piece of merchandise, to then a heroic sled dog in Yukon, Canada. There have been seven adaptations of the film, and the eighth—directed by *The Lion King*'s [Chris Sanders](#)—releases in theatres tomorrow. The film's editor, David Heinz, sat down with Hidden Remote to share some surprising facts about *The Call of the Wild* from his time on the film.

Famous for his work on *The Jungle Book*, as well as *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and *War for the Planet of the Apes*, David Heinz talks about not only the surprising location for the film's set and his experience of working with the show's second star, [Harrison Ford](#), but also why Sanders chose to have Buck be in CGI, the man behind the mutt, and why this adaptation will be different from all the others.

Hidden Remote: You've worked on films like *The Jungle Book* and *Planet of the Apes* where you were already doing a lot with CGI on epic animal adventure sort of films. Is that how you got involved with *The Call of the Wild*, or at least what drew you to the film?

David Heinz: Project-to-project and movie-to-movie, I'm just trying to look for the best story and work with the best storytellers I can. Chris Sanders was one of the writers on the original *Lion King* and he's a terrific storyteller. So, for me, it's not so much about the technology as it is the fact that it's a great story. What I do with visual effects as an editor is just storytelling anyway, so whether you're doing that with visual effects or not, it's all the same.

I was originally called to the project by the executive producer Ryan Stafford, who I've worked with on the last two *Planet of the Apes* movies. Ryan and Chris decided they were going to do quite a

bit of previews for the film, so it was clear right away that they needed editorial help. Usually, I don't come on to the movie until shooting starts or even after the scenes are already filmed, but this movie was great for me because I was able to work with them for almost a year before they filmed anything at all.



Hidden Remote: Is this the longest you've been a part of the filmmaking process?

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Heinz: Yes, definitely. *The Planet of the Apes* movies took a while and *Jungle Book* was a long run, but I wasn't on *The Jungle Book* the entire time. So, *The Call of the Wild* is by far the longest stretch I've ever had. In fact, just to illustrate that point, when I started working on this movie, I had no children and I now have two kids, both born during the process of me working on this movie. My wife just gave birth to our second son on Monday.

Hidden Remote: Congratulations! That's amazing. Were you a fan of Jack London as an author before starting work on *The Call of the Wild*? Had you read the book beforehand?

Heinz: I had. I don't know if it's still read in schools or not, but when I was in school it was absolutely required reading. I think I read it in junior high when I was 12 or 13. So I was totally

aware of the book for sure and a fan of it. I think what's interesting about our take on it is that people have tried to adapt this story throughout the years and really our film is the first-ever adaptation to attempt to take on the entire story.



Hidden Remote: That's probably why it took so long, right?

Heinz: Exactly. And also the technology required to do these fully animated, fully CGI characters. Everyone knows that Buck, the main character is a CGI dog, but as they watch the film they'll see there's quite a bit more CGI animals involved in the story.

We also wanted to keep the focus on the dog. The Call of the Wild, the original story, is entirely centered around the Buck, he's the main character of the story. But a lot of the other film adaptations have made the story about the human. We tried to remain as a staple to the source material and the book because it's such a classic, after all.

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Hidden Remote: Is that part of what went into deciding that the Buck would be CGI rather than having a live-action canine on set?

Heinz: I'd say so. Some people who have seen the trailer have asked that question, 'Why not shoot the movie with a real dog?' And to those people I've said, 'Just wait until you see that movie.' People are going to understand, within a few minutes of watching the film, why the story is told this way and, later in the film, there are sequences that 100 percent could not be accomplished with a live-action dog.

A lot of these people who are saying we should have shot with a real dog are animal lovers and I think animal lovers are going to end up being some of the biggest fans of this film out there, really.



Hidden Remote: You've said this was the longest span of time you've worked on a film. Were there any particular challenges to editing and working on this story, having spent so much time with it?

Heinz: The biggest challenge of this entire process is that the main character of this epic story doesn't talk. It's a crazy idea if you step back and think about it, to tell this story, of this character, who goes on this epic journey and meets all these different people and never says a word. It's largely my job to make sure the audience, moment-to-moment, understands what our main character, our main hero, is thinking and feeling in any given scene. It's my job to do that with purely visual storytelling because we don't have a dialogue to rely on.

That's also a challenge I'm really proud of, though. A lot of the feedback we get on the film is how emotional it is. To me, that says audiences are connecting with this character. That's exciting.



Hidden Remote: Were there any scenes that were really uniquely enjoyable to edit?

Heinz: Yeah, I got to edit Harrison Ford. It's amazing. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was probably one of the first movies I can remember watching. He's an absolute legend. He's incredible to work with

and his performance in this film is really beautiful. He does an amazing job and is really soulful. So any Harrison Ford scene I got the chance to cut was fine by me.

Hidden Remote: Did you get to meet him while working on the film?

Heinz: Yeah, he came into the cutting room quite a few times and came in for ADR as well. I also got to see him last night at the premier. He's really a great guy. I have to admit, when we were first working together, I was a little star-struck at first. He'd be in the cutting room and I'd be like, 'That's Indiana Jones!' He's a big part of why I got involved in movies in the first place.



Hidden Remote: With a story like this that's so emotional and where you have an audience that's seen renditions of this story told many times before, how do you go about trying to edit *The Call of the Wild* in a way that brings out new emotion, especially with silent characters like Buck.

Heinz: This is such a different film than something like *Planet of the Apes* because those are motion-captured films. We had terrific actors, like Andy Serkis, cast in those roles giving incredible performances that are then translated to the CGI versions of their characters. In this film, we did have a performer, Terry Notary, who "played" Buck. But I put that in quotes because there's no way for a human to physiologically act and move like a dog.

So really that emotion comes from a marriage with all the terrific work the animators are doing and then working with the footage the way I would as if that CGI character was a real actor. By and large, from audience feedback, I think we've done that.



Hidden Remote: Being in the editing department and getting to see all that goes on behind the scenes, are there any little fun facts about this film that you get excited to share with people? Things about the film they'd never guess about?

Heinz: Well I can tell you, the film is set in Alaska and the Yukon, but we did not film anything up there aside from aerial units that went up and shot background, so I think it's pretty amazing. A lot of people have been talking about the CGI of the dog, and that's all well and good and worth its own discussion, but it's pretty remarkable to think all the landscapes and vistas and backgrounds in the film are entirely computer-generated.

Hidden Remote: So where was the majority of the film set?

Heinz: The vast majority was filmed in California. What's hilarious to me is I've worked on a lot of films that filmed in Canada but were set in the U.S., and now I'm working on a film that was filmed in the U.S. and set in Canada. I think a big part of why we decided to shoot in California had to do with weather. Sending Harrison Ford and a gigantic movie crew out to the Yukon would've been a massive undertaking that may not have worked if a blizzard had been there.

But there's so much that can be done in this state. A lot of road trip movies look like they're driving across the country, but more often than not they're just driving across California. That's the magic of the movies.



Hidden Remote: As you've said, this is a very emotional film. Is there anything you think people should know or be thinking about before seeing *The Call of the Wild*?

Heinz: It's really an epic story we're trying to tell. It's got a little bit of everything—real heart and emotion and it's also got humor and a lot of adventure and action. I'm just proud we tried to make a really ambitiously big and fun film. It's really a coming-of-age story for this dog who starts out as a childish puppy and grows to be this epic hero.

It's also a great film for families. We've screened it with a lot of different audiences and it seems like kids really respond to the movie in a really fun way. At the premiere last night, I was sitting behind a whole row of kids and it was fun to watch their reaction to the movie.

It's a PG, family-friendly film that I think can appeal to a lot of different audiences. It's as much for a younger-suited audience as it is for an older one. I think everyone is going to love it.

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What's your favorite *The Call of the Wild* adaptation? Will you be seeing Chris Sanders' new film in theatres? Leave your thoughts in the comments below!

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