



EDGE OF THE KNIFE

DIRECTED BY HELEN HAIG BROWN AND GWAAI EDENSHAW

BASED ON AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY GWAAI EDENSHAW, JAALEN EDENSHAW, GRAHAM RICHARD AND LEONIE SANDERCOCK

Edge of the Knife is a feature length Haida language film about pride, tragedy, and penance. The film draws its name from a Haida saying, "the world is as sharp as a knife" - that as we walk along we have to be careful not to fall off one side or the other. This is the world we live in - so close to nature, our lives always hanging in balance - one slip can change everything. For Adiits'ii, the lead character in the film, that edge becomes razor thin as he is mentally and physically pushed to the brink of survival and becomes Gaagiixiid/Gaagiid - the Haida Wildman.

The Gaagiixiid is one of Haida's most popular stories, sustained over the years through song and performance. The Gaagiixiid describes a state of being that comes onto a person after they survive an accident at sea. Stranded and struggling for survival, their humanity gives way to a more bestial state.

This project is a community initiative with strong support from the Haida people as well as from the Council of the Haida Nation.

Script Synopsis

Edge of the Knife is a story of survival and redemption, secrets and self-discovery, set against the backdrop of the tangled rainforest and storm ravaged west coast of Haida Gwaii. Inspired by one of the Haida people's most popular vital stories – the Gaagiixiid/Gaagiid (or Wildman) – this is a transformation tale with an uncertain ending. The Gaagiixiid/Gaagiid story describes the fate of the young charismatic Adiits'ii, who, as the lone survivor of a disaster at sea, stranded far from home, instinctively clings to life. In his struggle with the elements, he survives, against all odds, but what lives on has little resemblance to his former humanity. In his guilt over the accident, compounded by his isolation, he loses his humanity and he becomes a Wildman, existing in a feral state.

In our version of this story, interwoven families are torn apart when Adiitsii's reckless acts lead to a tragedy. While Adiitsii deals with his own struggle for survival through a harsh winter in the wild, conflicting emotions of jealousy and revenge, sadness and the desire for reconciliation, divide his grieving family and community. A year passes before the families can return to the site of the accident, their summer fishing camp, and there they see indications that Adiitsii might still be alive. But can he be captured and reintegrated into the community, or must his family and community accept that he is a lost soul? Does Adiits'ii have a choice over his fate?

Script Synopsis (continued)

Through contemporary song and performance, and now through this first Haida feature film, the Gaagiixiid/Gaagiid story lives today in the hearts and minds of Haida, reminding us that we always live on the edge of the knife, at the edge of the world. *Edge of the Knife* is both a timeless story and a contemporary allegory of our Haida Nation.

Edge of the Knife is filmed entirely on location and spoken in two Haida dialects, with English subtitles.

Production Process

Edge of the Knife is a Haida film that is made by Haida, for Haida. The film was envisioned as a way to support Haida language, create local employment, promote Haida culture by bringing an ancient Haida story into a new space using the medium of film. Development for the film started in 2014 with support from Leonie Sandercock, a professor in Indigenous community planning at the University of British Columbia, and Zacharias Kunuk, the award winning Inuit director of *Atanarjuat: the Fast Runner*. Zacharias Kunuk and Igloodik Isuma Productions produced Canada's Best Ever Film (based on a 2015 TIFF poll) in one of the most remote locations in Canada, using a group of self-taught Indigenous filmmakers, with a small budget. With *Edge of the Knife*, Zacharias Kunuk and a few members of his production team, are bringing the "Isuma" model of Indigenous film production to the Haida Nation. Their role is to support the Haida production team throughout the production of the film.

Edge of the Knife is co-written by Gwaai Edenshaw, Jaalen Edenshaw, Graham Richard and Leonie Sandercock. In 2014, the three Haida writers teamed up with Leonie Sandercock under the guidance of elder Diane Brown for a community-based script writing process. The script writing team spent 12-months collecting stories and ideas through interviews, workshops, film screenings and writing seminars with people in the Haida communities of Old Massett and Skidegate. Before too long, it was clear that they should write a Haida Wildman story, and by April 2015 *Edge of the Knife* script was completed.

With a broadcast license from the Nunavut Independent Television Network, *Edge of the Knife* was approved for production funding by the Canadian Media Fund under the Aboriginal Program.

The script has been translated into northern and southern Haida languages by Delores Churchill and S.H.I.P. (Skidegate Haida Immersion Program). Pre-production is occurring in both Skidegate and Old Massett, with a 30-day principal photography period starting early September 2016, and a second unit shoot in the winter of 2016. The final film is expected to be completed by the winter of 2017.

About the Directors

Helen Haig Brown and Gwaai Edenshaw are Indigenous artists and storytellers. Gwaai is Haida, born and raised on Haida Gwaii. Helen is Tsilhqot'in who married a Haida artist and makes her home on Haida Gwaii.

As Indigenous artists and storytellers, Helen and Gwaai share aesthetic as well as intrinsic and cultural values, and have a shared vision for the realization of the Gaagiixiid story in film.



About the Directors (continued)

"We are not only excited at the prospect of working together, but even more excited to be working with Zacharias, whose feature films have been beacons for us for the past fifteen years. We are inspired by the Isuma collaborative approach to filmmaking and their commitment to film as a medium for revitalizing indigenous languages and cultures."

Gwaai Edenshaw is an accomplished artist who works in the mediums of sculpture, painting and animation with a long history of working as a Haida storyteller, Haida language champion and community facilitator. As Co-Director, Gwaai combines a personal investment in this iconic story with recent experience in animation and theatre production. Gwaai's experience as a Haida storyteller and engaged community member is vital to the authenticity and integrity of this story. This is a natural evolution for Gwaai's strong visual art and storytelling to venture into live action film.

Helen Haig-Brown is an accomplished filmmaker who has worked both in the documentary and dramatic realms. A trademark of Helen's work, even within her documentaries, is a very visual and audio driven form of storytelling that will complement the ethereal and magical elements of *Edge of the Knife*. Helen also brings her experience of adapting Tsilhqot'in traditional stories to the big screen. Her last short live action film, *The Cave*, was an adaptation of a traditional Tsilhqot'in story that brought the spirit realm to cinematic life in a subtle and beautiful way. *The Cave* went on to win top ten shorts in Canada by the Toronto International Film Festival Group in 2009, and was selected by Sundance and the Berlinale Festival. With over ten years of experience in directing, and a creative approach grounded in a belief in working collaboratively, Helen will bring the necessary expertise with the workings of a film set.

About the Producers



Edge of the Knife is produced by Jonathan Frantz with the financial and logistical support of Cara Di Staulo as Line Producer, and the guidance of Zacharias Kunuk as Executive Producer.

Jonathan Frantz holds a Masters degree in planning from the University of British Columbia and a Bachelors in Economics from the University of Western Ontario. As a Producer with Kingulliit Productions since 2012, he has overseen the coordination and delivery of multiple community media projects that support Inuit language and culture. Currently he is supervising the completion of Zacharias Kunuk's latest feature dramatic film *Maliglutit: Searchers*.

Edge of the Knife is managed through 1037125 B.C. Ltd., a 100% aboriginal owned sole purpose company incorporated for the production of the feature film.

FAQs About the Film

- Goal is to support and promote the learning of our Haida language.
- Film is entirely in Haida, acted by Haida actors.
- Largely Haida crew.
- Produced by a Haida production company with majority Haida ownership.
- Project mentored by award winning Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk and his production team.
- Intent is to support a local Haida film industry.
- Value behind the project is to build capacity in the community.
- Seeking support to showcase Haida cultural technology and artistic expression.

Supporters

Edge of the Knife is developed with the participation of Kunuk Cohn Productions and Telefilm Canada,

and produced with the financial participation of
the Canada Media Fund
the Province of British Columbia, Film Incentive BC
the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit

in association with
the Nunavut Independent Television Network – NITV

and with the contribution of
the Haida Gwaii Museum.

Interim financing for the *Edge of the Knife* is provided by the Rogers Telefund.

Edge of the Knife is also made possible with the support of
the Secretariat of the Haida Nation
the University of British-Columbia
the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
K'aalts'idaa K'ah

Producer's contact information:

Jonathan Frantz
jon@isuma.ca



www.facebook.com/EdgeOfTheKnifeMovie