

# DEADLINE

## **‘Ozark’ Editor Cindy Mollo On Explosive Season 3 Opener, Supersized Fourth Season & Saying Goodbye To Netflix Drama**

Matt Grobar



In the third season of [Netflix](#)’s crime drama [Ozark](#), editor [Cindy Mollo](#) had the opportunity to cut five episodes out of 10, finding one of her most fun creative challenges in explosive season opener, “Wartime.”

Created by Bill Dubuque and Mark Williams, *Ozark* centers on Marty and Wendy Byrde, a seemingly normal couple with two teenage kids who are forced to

relocate to the Ozarks, after a money-laundering scheme goes awry. Finding themselves in increasing danger while working for a Mexican drug cartel, the pair end up funneling cash through a riverboat casino, while contending with scrutiny from the FBI.

When Mollo returned from hiatus to cut Season 3, she connected with showrunner Chris Mundy—as she has each time around—to find out what she could expect from this latest installment. “Chris is so cute because he’ll say, ‘Do you want to know, or do you want to be surprised?’ And I’m like, ‘Well, it will still be a surprise when I read the scripts and see how you actually do it. But no, I want to know. What’s the arc of the season? What’s going to happen?’” says the five-time Emmy nominee, who has notched two consecutive nods for *Ozark*. “It really is like the best gossip session, because I know these characters like they’re people. He dangles these little story bits in front of me and I’m like, ‘Oh my God, that’s amazing.’”

Of the many “delicious” takeaways from this conversation, the key one was that Season 3 would be about contrast—a juxtaposition of the Byrdes’ everyday life with the physical and psychological violence inflicted by their employers. “Their worlds [were] going to clash this year,” Mollo says, “bigger than they have before” —and it was “Wartime” that hit this message home.

Directed by star Jason Bateman, the episode opens with a remarkably tense and highly cinematic sequence, establishing a war that is transpiring between rival drug cartels. Carting a pair of boxes into a Mexican market, a cartel enforcer methodically brutalizes a store owner and a pair of money launderers, before setting off bombs that rock the plaza, unleashing chaos, as drug money literally rains down upon civilians.

In the final cut of the episode, this carnage would be followed by a cheesy, star-wiping commercial for the Byrdes’ Missouri Belle riverboat casino, and shots overlooking Wendy’s laptop, in which she sees graphic images from the Mexican crime scene. “We are telling the audience, ‘This is the pond they are swimming in now. This is the world they find themselves in,’” Mollo says. “Then, at the same time, [her daughter] Charlotte is saying to her, ‘Do you want to talk to this woman who wants to put a toe ring stand in the casino lobby?’”

Interestingly, as the editor explains, the opening to Season 3 was initially written differently. “It still started with a scene of violence in Mexico, but it was meant to be in a cul-de-sac, where some black SUVs pull in, masked people go into a house. There are people in the house laundering money, and they all get massacred, and

the house gets blown up, and you realize that it's one cartel acting on another cartel," Mollo says. "The exact scene was going to be too expensive to shoot, because you'd have to build a house that you could see all sides of, and then destroy that."



For a long time, then, Mollo simply had a card in her cut that read, "Violence in Mexico"—a placeholder for the ultimate scene—as well as the casino commercial. "Some people were like, 'Well, maybe we just begin with the cheesy commercial, and then Wendy sees the violence on her computer,' and it certainly worked as an opening to a season. I mean, it was provocative, but it didn't make the violence real," the editor reflects. "It didn't set your teeth on edge at the beginning the season like, 'Oh man, this is a horrific place they're in now.'"

While this cut started Season 3 on "an absurd note," Mollo and the *Ozark* team knew that what they needed was something much more menacing—something with punch. Fortunately, the series' locations department then found a place in Georgia that, with very little set decoration, could be transformed into the open market in Mexico ultimately seen on screen. The scene was then rewritten, and Mollo's cut clicked. "So, I love the opening of that show, because it was almost like a little film class in, 'How does the opening of the show feel different if you do this?'" she says. "'How does it feel different if you do that?'"

For Mollo, sequences that are as visually driven as the “Wartime” opener are “incredibly fun” to cut, because they allow her to open up her whole toolkit, as an editor. “Then, you just have to make sure that while you’re having fun, piecing it together, people get the information they need, which is what this guy is doing, what’s in all those boxes. It’s really important that people understand he’s not there to steal the money. In fact, it’s kind of an ‘F you’ to the cartel whose money it is, to say, ‘I don’t even want your money. I just want to show you what I can do, how I can ruin you,’” she says. “It sounds kind of sick, but it’s fun to execute that, because you’re playing with your images, and your camera movement, and what the actors are giving you, the music. The only thing you’re missing is words.”

From the editor’s perspective, what makes sequences like these work so well—and what makes them so fun to work with—is the extent to which director, executive producer and star Bateman plots out his work. “He always has a plan. It’s pretty quickly put together, and then it’s the fine-tuning of things like, how long are we in black, hearing the ticking, before the bomb goes off? How long do we really need to be with those [money launderer] guys before we get him out the door?” she says. “Fine-tuning does take a little bit of time, but the original assembly, especially on that sequence, came together pretty well, pretty easily.”



While there are always exciting, visually-driven scenes to work with on *Ozark*, Mollo has also come to expect a series of staggering performances, from the likes of Bateman, Laura Linney, Julia Garner and Janet McTeer. The challenge in

working with these performances, as an editor, is to lean into the old adage that 'Less is more.'

"Someone once told me that I make it sound like I do nothing, but I really do believe that you have to sit and watch your dailies, and when you see a great performance, it's your job to just stay out of the way. Piece it together, tell the story that you know the writers intended, but let the performance live," Mollo says. "Jason has said this from the first episode, Season 1: 'We don't want to be cutting all the time, for the sake of cutting. If you find a performance that's working, and you can sit with it, you don't need to get in there and cut, cut, cut, unless it really adds to the scene.'"

"That's why people have said, 'You make it sound like you do nothing,'" the editor adds. "And I say, 'It takes a lot of discipline to do nothing, as an editor.'"

In Season 3, one of the most exciting performances came from a new member of the cast—Tom Pelphrey, who portrays Wendy's mentally unstable brother, Ben. "He just so embraced that role, and played the whole emotional range of what that character was going through so beautifully," Mollo says. "You know the storyline is coming, but then when you see it in reality, it's just really, really satisfying."

In June, it was announced that *Ozark* was renewed for a fourth and final, supersized season, consisting of 14 episodes split into two parts—and per Mollo, discussions about this new season have already begun. "I hear a date being tossed around [for a production start], but I don't have official word yet. I think right now, we're planning to start shooting in October sometime," she says. "All of that could change, but I know the writers are hard at work."

And while the editor is sad to say goodbye to the series, she can only reflect with gratitude now on a kind of project that doesn't often come along. "It seems like in your career, every 10 years, you get a show that you love working on, that people love to watch, [where] you enjoy your co-workers, you enjoy the material, and *Ozark* is certainly that for me," Mollo says. "I just love working on this show, so it's so gratifying to see that people respond to it."

"I've worked on a lot of shows that do one season and don't get a second, or pilots that don't get picked up. You know how rare it is to have something that goes four seasons like this, that people talk about. So, you just have to be grateful," the editor adds. "When we do go back, I will savor every minute,

because I know how rare this is. Not every job is something that you enjoy doing every day."