

Hope and passion are tenderly addressed in *Cancer Man*, a student thesis film written and directed by Jared Billings of Chapman University's Dodge College of Film and Media Arts in Orange County, California. The story follows Jake, a 30-something comic book artist suffering from cancer, and Clark, a young boy who is also battling cancer. They share a room at an overcrowded hospital, where Jake creates a comic book character dubbed Cancer Man, who suddenly has the power to cure the disease after a botched X-ray procedure.



## How **Cancer Man** created a real and mystical hero

Film stocks

KODAK EKTACHROME 100D color reversal film 5285  
KODAK VISION2 HD Color Scan Film 5299

Lab

Deluxe (Los Angeles)

The cinematographer is Dan Parsons, who is earning a Master's at the school. Parsons is also a teaching assistant with his mentor Bill Dill, ASC, who teaches cinematography. "*Cancer Man* is a very hopeful, supernatural drama," he says. "As the story evolves, Jake rediscovers a reason for his work, and finds a new passion for what he does."

Parsons began his career composing film scores after earning an undergraduate degree in music education at Mount Vernon Nazarene University in his home state of Ohio. In 2002, he enrolled in an eight-week film production course at the New York Film Academy. After completing that program, Parsons spent four years shooting features, commercials, documentaries and educational films in Austin, Texas, until he enrolled in the graduate program at Chapman.

Parsons explains that *Cancer Man* appealed to him because the story is based on reality but intertwined with flights of the

imagination. The film was produced in the Super 35 film format. For fantasy sequences, he chose KODAK EKTACHROME 100D color reversal film 5285 combined with a cross-processing technique

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at Deluxe labs in Los Angeles to create maximum saturation and contrast that emulates the look of a comic book or graphic novel. Scenes set in the hospital room were recorded on KODAK VISION2 HD Color Scan Film 5299. The look was fine-tuned in a digital intermediate (DI) suite on campus.

"For *Cancer Man* sequences, we wanted super-saturated, high-contrast images with the whites blown out completely and the blacks fully crushed," says Parsons. "We mainly created that look in camera with only minor tweaking in DI."

The cast and crew of *Cancer Man* filmed at practical locations for eight days. Hospital room scenes were produced at a working hospital in Orange County, and fantasy sequences in an abandoned

infirmary near Riverside.

Billings and Parsons created distinctive looks for each side of the hospital room to visually punctuate moods. "Jake's side is cold and sterile, and all his light comes from outside," Parsons describes. "We wanted to communicate the idea that this guy had given up. To begin, I lit his side of the room almost entirely through a window with diffusion on the glass, keeping it primarily off key. Conversely, Clark has hope despite his circumstances, so we used warmer practicals on his side of the room. During DI timing, I made

sure this concept remains a subtle, visual cue."

Parsons transitioned the light on Jake's side of the room to a warmer hue as his character evolves. "Jake realizes the impact he has had on Clark," he says. "It's the first glimpse of hope that we see in him. There is a montage sequence towards the end of the film where Jake is once again working on a comic book. We used warm light to show he has regained his enthusiasm for life."

Parsons mainly utilized equipment owned by the university, including an ARRI BL-4 camera and a set of prime lenses. He also made occasional use of a zoom lens when a shot called for a longer focal length. Those instances included an extreme close-up on Jake's eyes when he's looking at Cancer Man, and some shots of a comic book and some sketches that Jake creates.

Parsons graduates in May, and is looking forward to getting back out into the working world before teaching someday himself.