

Hiro Narita, ASC, explored new territory while filming **The Darwin Awards**. The film is a dark comedy written and directed by Finn Taylor. It features Joseph Fiennes as a forensic detective and Winona Ryder as an insurance investigator. They are looking into potential Darwin Award winners. The tongue-in-cheek award is presented to people who have improved the human gene pool by accidentally killing themselves in stupid ways.

**The Darwin Awards** was produced in both Super 16 and 35mm film formats at locations in Utah, Nevada and Northern California. Narita put finishing touches on the look in a digital intermediate (DI) suite at Monaco Labs in San Francisco.

"About half of the film is supposed to be documentary footage shot by a filmmaker," he says. "After seeing tests, we decided to shoot the documentary footage in Super 16mm and the narrative

16mm scenes with a handheld camera. Sometimes, we put the camera on top of a small shot bag, especially for long narrative scenes, to keep a looser feel."

Narita crafted subtly different looks for each of the narrative segments. The cinematographer frequently had the 35mm camera tracking on dollies, but he also used a HotHead, an insert car and a Pogo rig for some walking and talking shots. They filmed scenes in rain, artificial snow and on an ice covered lake. There are also green screen shots of characters for compositing with different backgrounds.

After the film was edited offline, the conformed negative was scanned and converted to digital files. Narita says that the DI was an interactive process.



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## A journey with Hiro Narita: filming **The Darwin Awards**

scenes in 35mm. I told Finn that if we were going to follow that route, we should definitely use a DI process rather than making an optical blow-up of the Super 16mm footage. Monaco Labs was incredibly supportive."

Test footage of a night exterior scene was scanned at both HD and 2K resolution. The differences were subtle, except that the 2K scan pulled more details off the negative. Monaco brought colorist Gary Coates on board to time the DI.

Both the Super 16 and 35mm segments of the story were shot by the same crew, mainly with a single camera. The 35mm footage was composed in 1.85:1, and the Super 16mm film was composed in 16:9. Narita used the same two stocks in both formats. Kodak VISION2 Expression 500T 5229/7229 films have reduced grain and lower contrast imaging characteristics, and Kodak VISION 200T 5217/7217 films are optimized to retain nuances in images during digital scanning.

"The director wanted the documentary footage to feel more interactive and immediate," says camera operator Georgia Packard, SOC. "The actors would look directly into the camera lens, allowing me to become a character. We shot most of the Super

"The director decided that some documentary segments should be part of the narrative story, so we did some grain reduction and image sharpening in DI," Narita says. "We shot a scene in the desert where the weather was constantly changing from dreary cloud cover to bright, warm sunlight. I had Gary (Coates) isolate the sky, and we manipulated colors, contrast and density to match all the desert footage."

There was also a night exterior scene where the main character was standing against a dark background. His costume blended into the background.

"I asked Gary to separate him from the background, and then we altered the contrast and played with secondary colors until I was satisfied," says the cinematographer. "I spent almost three weeks in DI, though not every hour of every day. He would time the scenes, and then I would come in and ask him to make adjustments. There is a very specific language when you're working with a timer in a film lab. You tell him how many points of magenta or blue you want. It's a different language in DI. You tell the colorist to make that scene contrastier or make the blues in her dress pop. You have to be there to see it." ■

**Top:** (L to R) Second camera assistant Anne Lee, Hiro Narita, ASC and camera operator Georgia Packard, SOC preparing to shoot a scene for *The Darwin Awards*.

**Above:** (L-R) David Arquette and Brad Hunt in a scene from the film.