

30 Days of Night

a dark story in every way

Stocks
KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 (Super 35 format)

Cinematographer
Jo Willems

30 Days of Night is a film adaptation of a graphic novel set in Barrow, Alaska. The town, which is located on the Arctic Circle, is attacked by a band of bloodthirsty vampires during a month of perpetual night. Jo Willems, who was the cinematographer, estimates that 90 percent of the story plays out in darkness.

"I didn't want the lighting to be too stylized as horror films often are. I did not want the usual smoke and shafts of light. I wanted it to feel raw, real and natural."

30 Days of Night was produced in Auckland, New Zealand, by Columbia Pictures, a Sony Pictures Entertainment Company. The film was directed by David Slade, and stars Josh Hartnett and Melissa George as separated husband and wife. He is the local sheriff and she works for the fire department. Danny Huston plays the leader of the vampires.

An early decision was made to produce *30 Days of Night* in Super 35mm film format coupled with digital intermediate (DI) timing in post-production. Willems explains that the script called for a 2.4:1 aspect ratio, because the landscape plays an important part. He notes that the large number of visual effects sequences made Super 35 format and DI timing natural choices.

"We envisioned a certain rawness in the look, but rich in tonality and without grain," he says. "I tested 500 and 200-speed negatives extensively, primarily to convince the studio why I wanted to shoot a whole movie set at night with KODAK VISION2 200T 5217 film," Willems relates. "I feel it has more tonality and range needed to film scenes in darkness with snowy backgrounds and dark costumes. For most of the night exteriors I played most of my exposures about two stops under key."

The sets included the exterior of the town, which was built on a backlot next to an airfield. It had about 30 houses, shops, a church, a hotel and a gas station. There were piles of white artificial snow, consisting of paper and Epson Salt, covering all exterior settings.

Willems had two large cranes 100 feet above that set. Each of them carried 200 kilowatts of light in a softbox. Lamps on all of the largest sets were rigged to a control board. Panavision in New Zealand provided his camera package, including two Millennium XL cameras with full sets of Primo and zoom lenses. Willems says that the original plan called for 'fairly controlled' camera movement tracking with dollies and a Steadicam, but they intuitively shifted to covering a lot of the action handheld.

"The handheld movement adds kinetic energy, a sense of urgency, and a feeling of unease," he says. "The audience is never just an observer. We composed shots from the perspective of someone who is there witnessing the story as it happens. It engages the viewer emotionally. We filmed some scenes with an 11-degree shutter angle. We had storyboards and planned looks for scenes, but we trusted our instincts and changed stuff on the fly. I don't light in a dogmatic way but more instinctively. Truthfully, I was a little nervous at first. It was only my fourth movie, and it had a \$30 million budget, but David and the producers had faith in me to do the job."

They completed original photography for *30 Days of Night* in 70 shooting days over a 15-week schedule, with additional cinematography by a second unit crew that also filmed elements for effects shots. The negative was processed at Atlab (a Kodak Imagecare Program accredited lab), and the DI and most other post-production were done at Peter Jackson's Weta Digital facility and Park Road Post in New Zealand.

1 (L-R) Actors Manu Bennett, Melissa George and Josh Hartnett in a scene from *30 Days of Night*, shot by DP Jo Willems. Photo: Kirsty Griffin ©2007 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.