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Cinematographer Bengt Jonsson describes **Duel** as a “place out of time.” The short film is a glimpse of history envisioned by writer-director Dominic Cernigilo. The story unfolds in the far reaches of an ancient kingdom. A lone soldier stumbles upon a deserted tavern where an altercation between two men changes the course of their lives.

“Dominic is a very collaborative director who was open to input from all department heads,” says Jonsson. “We used **Shogun Assassins**, **Braveheart** and similar films as visual references. We wanted to create a very intimate and heavy feeling with real contrast between the looks of exterior and interior scenes.”

The short film was produced in Super 35mm format in 2.4:1 aspect ratio. Jonsson explains that he and Cernigilo envisioned telling the story with the scope of cinematic wide screen images that places the characters in the environment. They envisioned **Duel** “as the **Titanic** of short films.”

### Flexibility

Jonsson knew before production began that they would have the flexibility of timing the film and fine-tuning the look during a digital intermediate process.

“That enabled us to play more in the toe of the negative—dealing with under exposure when we were shooting in near darkness,” explains Jonsson. “When the difference between two stops under and three stops under are only a footcandle, you achieve a soft transition which is beautiful on film.”

**Duel** was primarily produced on a tavern set with some outdoor scenes filmed in Northern California wine country. Jonsson says the production took on “a new life” when they moved to the exterior location. Challenges included the remoteness of the location and wet weather.

Jonsson’s camera package comprised ARRI 535, 435, and SL Cine camera bodies with Cooke S4 Primes provided by Keslow Camera. Images were recorded on Eastman EXR 500T 5298 film.

“We were shooting pretty much wide open at T-2 except for a few exteriors where I used deeper stops,” Jonsson says. “The Cookes were chosen because the tavern set was full of lit practical candles and the lenses handle the flames perfectly.”

“It was raining for almost every portion of the exterior shoot,” says Jonsson. “The biggest problem came about when half of our power failed, so we had half the light we had planned. Fortunately, the Lightning Strikes heads used to create bursts of lightning were battery powered.”

The bursts of lightning visually punctuated the drama and revealed glimpses of details in the darkness which, Jonsson says, “were beautifully resolved on film.”

### Moody feel

After the film was edited, the conformed negative was scanned and converted to a high definition D5 master at MatchFrame in Burbank, California.

Jonsson and Cernigilo timed the film for shot to shot continuity while putting finishing touches on the look in an interactive environment with colorist Randy Coonsfield at MatchFrame. The cinematographer explains that they used Power Windows to isolate people, objects and

other elements of shots, and manipulated colors, contrast and other details of those elements of images. In some of the darkest exterior scenes, they were able to tighten the black levels to maintain a moody feel.

“Typically, in a normal photochemical post process, the blacks would have gone a little muddy,” he says. “The DI allowed us to tighten up these levels

## Bengt Jonsson on the making of **DUEL**

easily. It definitely lent to a look that was ultimately good for the story.”

He points out that the other big advantage of the DI process is that the digital files are “squeezed” into 2.4:1 aspect ratio and recorded directly on 35mm color intermediate film, which is used as a master for generating release prints. “You eliminate an optical step required with a traditional lab process,” Jonsson says, “and that gives us a look, which reflects the quality of the images recorded on the original negative. I’m amazed by how good it looks.”

For more information about where to see **Duel**, visit [www.oldworldfilm-works.com](http://www.oldworldfilm-works.com). ■

**Above:** (L to R) Matthew Rimmer and Jonathan Fraser in a scene from *Duel* shot by DP Bengt Jonsson.

**Below:** DP Bengt Jonsson on location while shooting *Duel*.

