



1 (L-R) Gaffer Phillip Matarrese and actress Stephanie DeMott on the set of *Heart of the Argos*.

Nottage and Elium create romance in **Heart of the Argos**

Matthew Elium and Spenser Nottage didn't officially open San Francisco-based Quandary Film and Animation until 2004, nearly a decade after delighting their sixth grade classmates with home movies about aliens and gangsters. The filmmaking team's latest project combines science-fiction adventure with a love story. *Heart of the Argos* focuses on the romantic tensions between a pilot and one of her crewmates, the ship's mechanic, as they face the unknown dangers of space.

"Spenser and I work very much together on an idea in its early stages," says Elium. "Exploring and crafting a story from that first random impulse into a coherent, meaningful, entertaining finished product is the key. We created the story together. I'm just the guy who eventually put it down on the page."

Nottage and Elium both have backgrounds in illustration and animation. They relied on their drawing and painting skills to create a "new look" for *Heart of the Argos*.

Wide lenses create fantastic look

"One of the major themes is the struggle between the organic and the mechanical," explains Nottage. "Every element of the visual design incorporates this idea. The set was built to have mechanical structures overgrown with organic shapes, and the colors are a strong play of red and green. We wanted to create a feeling of "atmospheric dissonance," where you could see a haunting struggle between life and machinery."

Production of the 30-page script took place over nine days on a 9 x 11-foot set. The set was built to allow filming to seamlessly move from one room to the other, float through the walls, and drop below the floor. "We had about 50 carefully placed practical lights that were wired into the set and run through a dimmer system," says Nottage. "This gave us a great deal of very interesting lighting situations that were crafted fairly quickly."

The confined production space was one of the reasons they chose to shoot with the new ARRIFLEX 416 camera and Ultra 16 lenses. "The wide lenses spread our beautiful set out behind the actors," says Nottage. "We shot all of our close-ups with the 14mm lens, and then used the 6mm for the wide shots, which created a fantastic look."

Nottage says another benefit to using the ARRI 416 was that it allowed their recorder to get clean sound even when the camera was right next to the actors' faces.

They chose KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film primarily for its fine grain and wide latitude. "We wanted the visuals to be captured organically," says Nottage, "and for all those textures we worked so hard to create to be seen and felt in the final product. Since we had a lot of practicals and bare bulbs, we needed something that could handle the bright lights without losing too much detail, and yet still reach into the shadows. The 7218 film was clearly the best choice for the versatility we needed."

Epic space

Camera movement also had to be very deliberately planned. Nottage and Elium worked with key grip Joe Matarrese to create three distinctive looks throughout the story. "When the ship was in space, the camera lived on a jib arm and dolly, so that the frame floated subtly, as if the audience were sitting on a dockside looking at a gently drifting boat," says Nottage. "After the ship crashes on the planet, the camera remained on a tripod, keeping the shots firm and steady. Finally we resorted to handheld camerawork when the scenes got hectic."

Elium says post-production of *Heart of the Argos* will include stop-motion animation, matte painting, models, and 3-D work. "We have to add everything from epic space and landscape backgrounds to spacecraft exteriors, explosions, and animated critters. Our goal is to keep everything as real as possible, so we're giving our team the option of working with different mediums."

"Spenser and I believe that it's important to get everyone involved, invested and excited about the project because that enthusiasm shows," adds Elium. "A film can't be just the work of one or two individuals; it's a glorious collaboration of many people with many different skills and talents all striving to create something crazy."

To keep up-to-date on production of *Heart of the Argos*, visit www.heartoftheargos.com.