



1 Post-production tool

LaserPacific accuratelMAGE™ system with Kodak proprietary technology and ASC Color Decision List

Tropic Thunder

producing a film in the eye of the storm

John Toll, ASC describes *Tropic Thunder* as a comedy and action movie that periodically gets serious. The film opens with a big battle scene seemingly in the midst of the Vietnam War. The audience quickly discovers they are watching the production of a Hollywood movie based on a book written by a Vietnam War veteran.

After a disenchanted studio mogul pulls the plug on production, the veteran and director conspire to lure the actors to a jungle in Southern Asia, where they plan to produce a TV reality show. The story takes a dramatic turn when the actors are attacked by a warlord's drug gang and forced to become the soldiers they were portraying in order to survive.

Tropic Thunder was produced by DreamWorks SKG for distribution by Paramount Pictures. It was the first collaboration for John Toll, ASC and Ben Stiller, who co-authored the script, directed the film, and played a leading role in an ensemble cast.

The production schedule included 10 weeks on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, where the terrain, dense foliage and weather provided the right backgrounds and environments, including sudden rain squalls. One location, Mt. Waialeale, has more rainfall than anywhere else on earth.

Digital dailies

Tropic Thunder was produced in Super 35mm film format in 2.4:1 aspect ratio. Toll had first and second unit crews working with multiple cameras virtually all the time. An aerial crew shooting from a helicopter provided additional coverage from a different perspective.

During the first several weeks of production, Deluxe in Los Angeles provided film dailies of scenes selected by Toll. He wanted to see how effectively they were capturing a

sense of time, place and the emotional flow of the story while shooting in challenging environments.

Toll had heard about the aIM digital dailies system developed by LaserPacific in Los Angeles. The system includes a digital projector calibrated to simulate a film look that is consistent with all calibrated viewing devices used in post-production.

"We set up the film and digital projectors next to each other and watched dailies of the same shots side-by-side for a while," Toll says. "They weren't identical, but very, very close. If you are originating images on film, it's important to see how the images look on film."

Toll, second unit cinematographer Josh Bleibtreu and their crews subsequently used the aIM system to watch dailies together almost every night. It was a bonding experience that

helped to keep everyone on the same track. They could feel, as well as see, visual nuances.

Density corrections

"Another great thing about the aIM system is that it allows you to color correct individual shots based on a point system similar to a printing scale at a film lab," Toll says. "If I wanted to make RGB color corrections or density corrections, I could make those corrections on the location digital projector and then speak to John Allen, the colorist in Los Angeles, and tell him what I had done. He was doing his dailies transfer on exactly the same type of calibrated projector, so he saw the corrections I made and knew exactly what I liked."

1 (Left to right) Actor Jay Baruchel looks on as actor-director Ben Stiller discusses a scene with cinematographer John Toll, ASC on location in Kauai, Hawaii, for the film *Tropic Thunder*.

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