

Surviving the elements filming

Unearthed

With more than 100 credits as a cinematographer, Ken Blakey thought he had seen it all. At least 75 of his credits are long-form narrative projects, the majority of them independent features. A half dozen of the more recent films he's made have premiered on the Syfy network. His most recent project, *Unearthed* (working title at press time), will be a post-theatrical premiere for the network as well.

The film, produced by Andrew Stevens and directed by Tripp Reed, takes viewers to the Amazonian jungle, where a jewel-encrusted dagger is removed from its rightful resting place, a bewitched burial ground. Revenge takes the form of a voracious plant creature that envelops the interlopers and tears them limb from limb.

tough, but the film cameras performed beautifully and the movie really looks like it was filmed in a murky South American jungle."

"The stipulations of the theatrical release contract required that we shoot in 35mm film, a requirement for all premiere features on the Syfy Network as well," says Blakey. "I was all too happy to comply."

Blakey generally shot with two cameras, an ARRICAM Lite on the Steadicam and an ARRI 535B, often handheld. He chose KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 film in part because the entire shoot, with the exception of one all-nighter, took place in daylight exteriors. Occasionally, Blakey overexposed slightly, perhaps a third of a stop.

"I used to overexpose more," says Blakey. "I have a lot more confidence in the film stock now,

"The 250D is very forgiving with mixed light, has wide latitude and produces vibrant color."

control contrast and help keep the green from the foliage and UV in the shade out of the actor's skin tones," he says.

The forest canopy prevented him from getting the lamps very high up. It was also impossible to get Condors a mile and a half into the thicket. A generous layer of smoke was usually laid in to complement the lighting and to communicate jungle humidity. Sometimes 45- or 90-degree shutter angles were used to raise the tension in action sequences.

There was a significant visual effects component to the shoot involving stunts and effects. "We brought in 20-by-20 feet blue screens to shoot in the actual locations, since green screens might blend with the foliage and we had no stage days scheduled," says Blakey. "Using the available ambient light and a couple of 12Ks, we could light it up and get seamless results with the VISION3 stock. The 250D is very forgiving with mixed light, has wide latitude and produces vibrant color."

Cineworks in New Orleans did the front-end lab work, and the rest of post-production is being handled at Lucid Post in Dallas, a subsidiary of MPS Studios, who also supplied cameras and grip/electric equipment.

"It was a very tough shoot," says Blakey. "But the images are turning out great. I can't imagine it would have gone as smoothly had we been shooting with electronic cameras under such taxing conditions. Pouring rain, high humidity and heat are rough on crew and equipment, but the ARRI cameras and Kodak film performed flawlessly."



Despite Blakey's deep experience, the project held some surprises for him, including being flooded out of three separate locations in the Louisiana swamps near Shreveport. A few days into the schedule, the principal set was under six feet of water.

Nevertheless, the swamps lent the story a convincing jungle feel, says Blakey. "Getting our equipment into the bush was

because you've got the range and the latitude. In situations where I want to dig into the shadows, I'll rate the 250 at 200, or maybe 160, as long as I have the light to do that."

Blakey often crosslit with 12K and 6K Pars diffused for source light or to create modeling on the talent. "I used a lot of 20-by-20 feet black rags as negative fill to

Key Data at a glance

Cinematographer	Ken Blakey
Cameras	ARRICAM Lite and an ARRI 535B
Film stock	KODAK VISION2 250D 5205
Image transfer	Cineworks, New Orleans
Post-production	Lucid Post, Dallas

1 Actress Wanetah Walmsley (left) is ready for her scene, while the crew and director Tripp Reed (second from right) prep. (Photo Credit: Ken Blakey)