

Let There Be Red! **Invest Wisely** in 168 Film Project

By Jay Burgin

If God created the world in seven days out of nothing, what can a filmmaker create with a camera in that time?

That's basically the premise of the Los Angeles-based 168 Hour Film Project, an international film competition with a faith-based theme. While the competition allows film or digital entries, Atlanta-based cinematographer Jim McKinney chose to create a project with the recently developed Red One camera and expand on his skills as a writer and director. Each of the almost 82 teams who entered the competition were challenged to shoot, edit and deliver an 11-minute movie based on a theme and a Bible verse in one week. The resulting shorts were screened at the 168 Film Festival

Writing a producible script with an all volunteer cast and crew proved to be one of the more difficult challenges of the entire project — not to mention the extremely limited time and budget. The short drama, titled *Invest Wisely*, revolves around a difficult ethical choice that a foreclosure investor has to face when confronted with the lives of his tenants. With the help of casting director Ken Feinberg, McKinney recruited some of Atlanta's top actors, whom he knew from his commercial and feature work in the market.

The camera was donated by Joe Kleber, owner of Red Acquisition Warehouse, who also worked on the shoot as the DIT (digital imaging technician). "Jim and I had collaborated on some of the first Red shoots in Atlanta," remarked Kleber, "and had worked out much of the 4K to 2K workflow on some music videos and early commercial projects. This was a relatively longer-form project and we had more to manage in the raw media and proxies, off-loading the 'dailies' to an external hard drive each day."

"As a cinematographer, the production work and even the directing came natural, but I decided to edit it myself on Final Cut Pro," McKinney says with a smile, "which I had never done before!" He completed the first edit just using the 2K high-rez proxies, which are generated by the Red Camera at the same time it makes the 4K RAW file. It



Joe Kleber adjusts rigging on the hood of a car for a traveling shot through the windshield.



Director/DP Jim McKinney (center) sets up a dolly shot

was then rushed off to the festival somewhat incomplete. "I always wanted to do a final color correction," McKinney explained, "but there was not enough time. Fortunately I was able to enlist Cinefilm — the lab I've used for years — as an additional volunteer."

Cinefilm, the only film lab in the Southeast, houses the first digital intermediate projection facility in Atlanta and is riding the wave of the film and digital workflow to enhance their Spirit and DaVinci transfer work. John Petersen, a ten-year

veteran colorist was eager to work with the new Red material using FCP Color in 2K.

"We find that unlike an HD camera, the Red files are more like raw negative," states Petersen, as he works the track-ball surfaces of the Tangent control panels. "The proxies created on the set are more like dailies. To utilize the full potential of the Red camera, you need to go back to the 4K raw files to get the full gamma range for best color correction. The Red camera makes an excellent image, but like HD cameras, the digital files need color correction as much or more so



COLOR CORRECTED!

The Red holds detail well as shown in this frame of a shot at dusk. “We needed to change the mood of this scene,” notes Cinefilm Colorist John Petersen, “so I took it from a cold blue tone (*bottom of frame*) toward the red spectrum to give it a more ‘human’ feel.” Cinefilm conformed the 4K raw files to full 2K resolution for the final color correction.

How a problem shot was helped by the colorist. The time and budget of the project didn’t allow McKinney to properly flag the shot on location so it was *improved* using FCP Color.



when compared to the latitude of 35mm film.”

An example of this is evident in a scene looking into the windshield of a car. “I did not have the budget to properly light that shot on location,” McKinney laments, “and it was almost unusable, but John was able to remove a lot of glare and return a great deal of life and detail from the raw file.”

“We also had another major issue,” adds McKinney. “The climactic scene was shot on a porch near dusk, yet had to match the scenes shot in bright daylight. The porch scene was very ‘cold’ in tone but John ‘warmed’ it, which added a more ‘human’ emotional sense to the encounter with the tenant. I’m impressed with what John did using FCP Color, because you can’t expect the same finesse from a normal editor using only a mouse and a keyboard.”

“I’m excited about the Red camera,” McKinney exclaims. “It provides true Super 35 cinematography in 4K resolution, and I can say that without any qualifying statements. If I’m going to shoot something at

that level of quality, I want it treated just like I treat my 35 mm film projects, and I need full quality color correction to run with the big dogs.”

One technical aspect the team realized that most Red users overlook is that the 2K high-rez proxy files made by the camera are not true ‘2K’ when composing for 16 x 9 output to HD. They are limited by the 1024 height of the 4K half-rez, so are only 1820 x 1024, smaller than HD (1920x1080). That’s why Cinefilm recommends to down-rez from the 4K raw file to get a true 2048 x 1152, 2K file, before making an HD copy.

While not eligible for awards at the 168 Hour Festival due to a last minute

schedule conflict for McKinney, *Invest Wisely* garnered a slot in the preferred evening screening and received a very favorable audience response. “This festival presented a great challenge technically and certainly creatively to integrate the faith-based message in telling a story, but like the other seven-day creation story, I rested, viewed the film... and it was good!” laughs McKinney.

For more info on *Invest Wisely*, email Jim McKinney, mckinneybro@gmail.com; on the 168 Hour Film Project, visit www.168project.com; To contact Cinefilm, call Joe Huggins at 800-633-1448, or email joe@cinefilmlab.com. www.cinefilmlab.com