

Cinematography on "Trail of Blood"

Contributed by Count Alexander

What camera gear did you use?

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The new indie film Trail of Blood is a psychological thriller about a young marine recruit and his friends who stumble across some dead bodies on a camping trip. They are then mistaken for murderers by a troubled veteran who decides to teach them about the horrors of war through a series of torturous mind games. The film was written and directed by brothers Justin and Joseph Guerrieri, produced by fellow USC alums Veronica Shamo-Garcia and Matthew Hsu, and executive produced by Joe Dante (The Howling, Gremlins and “Masters of Horror”).

[To Justin Guerrieri] What were the main challenges for you?

The main challenge in shooting this film was that we knew we wanted to shoot the movie in less than two weeks, on my brother's vacation time, and we knew the only way to do it right was to keep some of the parameters simple, so we wrote a movie that takes place essentially during one day in the forest. We found some beautiful locations outside of Los Angeles in the Angeles National Forest. We shot the film in 12 days with a great team of local Los Angeles crew, many of whom we have been working with since our time at USC film school, and a phenomenal cast of some veteran actors and some rising stars. With our director of photography, Collin Brink, we chose to shoot the film under [a] shady forest canopy with a mixture of soft light and dappled light for a dramatic but natural look. We shot in long takes with a dynamic handheld camera moving with the actors.

What camera gear did you use?

We chose to shoot on the RED ONE camera –– RED ONE, Build 15 –– because it has a beautiful film-like look and, most of all, because in our tests, it responded better than comparable HD cameras in high-contrast situations –– the deep shadows and hot highlights showed very little digital noise and held a lot of detail. We used Zeiss standard-speed primes with no diffusion or filtration on the lens, and alternated between wide and long focal lengths. We recorded exclusively to RED hard drives, rather than flash cards, which allowed us to shoot all day on a single mag and helped us to move quickly.

What about camera accessories?

The camera accessories were a mix of RED, ARRI and Chrosziel. Our handheld grips were a combination of RED and others with foam pool toys for padding. We used a battery-powered 200w HMI Sun Gun for fill or eye light, and we used grip equipment [such as] small overheads, bounces, mirrors [and] diffusion frames to shape the sunlight. Our first AC, Rich Pereksta, was terrific and had worked with the RED before and knew how to keep it running smoothly and how to get the most out of it. The camera performed well with various slow-motion speeds and even several handheld running shots. For some of our more surreal sequences we used Steadicam, and Steadicam Operator Christopher Ivins did an amazing job. In one of these sequences Agent Weston, played by Robert Picardo, [from] “Star Trek: Voyager” [and] “Stargate: Atlantis,” pieces together a triple murder as the murders uncannily replay around him. This sequence is one of our favorites and could not have worked without Steadicam.

How did you deal with visual effects?

We are currently completing the film's visual effects, and Visual Effects Artist and Animator Christopher P. Redmann is working straight from the raw RED files, so he will have the maximum level of detail and control to create some of the thrilling gunfights and blood-and-gore effects. This was our first feature and we only had 12 days to shoot it, but the technology available today in both production and post is a large part of what made this film possible. Our amazing team of cast and crew and our dedicated producers made the production a joy to work on, and their talents brought the story to life.

ARRI

www.arri.com

RED

www.red.com

Steadicam

www.tiffen.com

Zeiss

www.zeiss.com