

PROJECT NAME *The Ore*

OFFLINE *FCP & DVCPRO - iTB drive*

ACQUISITION *P'son HVX200 720/24p*

ONLINE *To After Effects for grade & FX then back to FCP*

RECORDING *2x4gb P2 (wanted more)*

CASE STUDY FILE PART 1

THE ORE

How To Make An HD Sci-fi Short With CGI For \$3k. A Q&A With Directors Sam Balcomb & Jesse Soff

Tell me a bit about the production - why did you decide to shoot the way you did?

Jesse: We shot the way we did due to budget constraints. It was a very 'run 'n gun' shoot. Most of our budget was spent on costumes/props and

feeding the cast and crew (seriously) so we didn't have too much money to spend on locations. The only location we had to pay for was Hollywood United Methodist Church, which was our Opera House setting. But we got a great deal, so no complaints there. Basically, production took a week and was only accomplished through a lot of hard work by a volunteer cast and crew. We spent a few long days up in the mountains in less than ideal conditions, but I think that helped bring everyone together. All in all, production on [The Ore](#)¹ was a really fun experience.

¹www.theore.net

Sam: As we were writing the script, the Panasonic HVX-200 came onto market. Its tapeless HD functionality and wide array of features gave us a wonderful box of tools to work with. It's always a little scary coming out of the gate with unproven technology, but we weren't let down in the least.

How did *The Ore* come about, what the story about?

Sam: Jesse and I did a short film called *Texas Fortune* in 2005, and had a good time working together. We were invited to visit [Park City](#)² during Sundance to screen it, and while we were there, we took the time to come up with something new. Science fiction is one of my favourite genres, and I think there's a bit of a stigmatism to low budget sci-fi shorts. Our main goal with this was to attempt going beyond the usual expectations for an endeavour like this. Jesse, what's the story about?

²www.parkcityinfo.com/arts/sundance/

Jesse: The story revolves around a woman who has lost her son. After years of searching for the reason behind his disappearance, she stumbles upon the truth and sets out to make things right. That's the story in a nutshell. Of course, as is the case with Sci-Fi, there's a lot more than meets the eye.

Sam: In other words, our story is about Transformers.

What decided you to base the story on Sci-Fi with all the FX and miniatures that were needed?

Jesse: Sam and I are constantly trying to challenge ourselves. My goal as a director is to work in as many genres as possible. I think people like Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino have the right idea. It's a lot of fun to jump into a genre and see how you can add your own, personal stamp to it. We knew going in that it was going to be difficult,

especially post-production. We didn't have any miniatures, although that would have been a lot of fun. All the FX in the film are CG, and all of them were completed by Sam. We had no other Visual FX artists working on the project. It was all Sam.

How have you produced the VFX?

Sam: During film school, I realised the stories I wanted to tell were fairly high concept. Ever since I was a kid, I loved visual effects. But I was a starving student with no money to pay skilled artists to create this stuff, so I had no choice but to learn. Modelling, texturing, compositing, keying etc was great fun, and *The Ore* was just another step in the educational process. All the 3D work was done in Cinema 4D, with compositing and colour grading done in Adobe After Effects. I'm nowhere near the skill level I'd like to be, so projects like this are great for pushing yourself out of the comfort zone.

Jesse: Going into this film I was a novice when it came to special effects. Most of the films I'd done before were slice-of- →



PROJECT NAME

The Ore

DISTRIBUTION

Available to order through theore.net with 2.5 hours of extras

GRADING

After Effects in 16 Bit colour space

CASE STUDY FILE PART 2

life stories that were based in our reality. Jumping into a genre like this, I really had to open my mind to get a grasp on what it would take to create this world for The Ore. It was a huge learning experience.

What was the post production route, did you have it mapped out before shooting?

Jesse: I'm not sure we really knew what we were getting ourselves into. As I said earlier, we knew it would be challenging, but I think the scope of the film grew as we went forward with production and even into post-production. When we did our first rough cut and saw the gaps that were going to be filled by CG shots, I think we were both like, "Wow, this is going to be a lot of work!"

Sam: I created a bunch of concept designs in 'prepro', and even some test renders of the various environments. When we had our first read through with the cast, we shot them in costume in front of a green screen - from there, we could conceptualise the look of the film very early in the process. At that stage we made a website for the cast and crew with these materials, so they could understand the look and feel of this really weird world.

What format are you shooting - 24p etc?

Sam: Yes, 24p/n, which is progressive native, at 720p resolution. For a while we considered downconverting to SD in post, but in the end we finished the film in HD. I'm glad we did, considering the incredible [distribution options now for high definition product.](#)³

Has the experience met the expectation?

Jesse: I think it exceeded our expectations. We had a lot of fun making 'Texas Fortune' and we wanted to work together again. We have a group of people that we always seem to work with, both actors and crew, but we also wanted to work with some new people. That could have gone either way, but ultimately it was such a great experience that I'm glad we went outside of our comfort zone a bit. From top to bottom, making The Ore was a phenomenal experience.

Sam: Shooting a short film is like cramming all the stress and problems of a feature film into a very tiny window of time. With that said, I'm just so pleased it went off without any major hitches. Every single day of production, you're terrified something will go wrong... especially on a show with lots of stunts, effects work, and complex costuming. I think it's a testament to our actors and crew that things went so smoothly.

What would you do differently?

Sam: There's some minor shots, VFX work, or lines of dialogue that didn't turn out as well as expected, but on the whole I'm pleased with the end product, and excited to take what we've learned and apply it to the next film. Some people have a problem with letting go of their baby - I'm just happy to get it out into the world and see how people respond.

Jesse: Oh there's probably a ton of stuff I'd have done differently. Lot's of little things really, but I agree with what Sam said. I'm very happy with the end product; and for everything

I would have changed, there were so many things that turned out better than I expected. I guess it all evens out.

If you had the budget would you have shot in film?

Jesse: That's a good question. For me, I think the answer would be yes. There's something about film that is quite aesthetically pleasing. So, yeah, if we had the time and money to shoot on film, I think we would have. That said, working in HD has been really fun. The HVX shoots a really nice picture and more importantly, it's much easier to work cheaply and quickly shooting HD, as opposed to working with film, which can be a cumbersome process.

Sam: I think if the budget was there to shoot film, we would have aimed for a feature length movie. In the end, this is an experiment - can we shoot a short Sci-Fi epic for just Three Grand? That was the major point of The Ore, and if the resources needed to shoot film were available, it would have made much more sense to go full length.

How have you matched FX with HD?

Sam: As good as the HD is, it's still quite fuzzy compared to the crispness of CGI. So any added elements had to be softened slightly to match, and then 'comped' with digital noise. In low-light situations, digital video can really suffer from noise, however the HVX produces one of the cleanest images of any camera in that range, in my opinion. The other main consideration in compositing is matching the contrast levels... we had a recent discussion about this on our message boards. It's a very difficult thing to do correctly, and can be a glaring problem, especially when viewed on a nice big plasma.

How was your production changed by shooting high definition?

Jesse: I think the biggest thing was the speed of the process. We could change setups quickly and because we were shooting to P2 media, we could actually see the footage moments after we shot it. That actually helped post-production too because we didn't have to spend any time digitizing. As we filled the cards up, we dumped the footage on set and that was that.

Sam: Since wrapping The Ore, we've refined the P2 workflow even more. We recently shot a music video where our editor was on set the whole time with a MacBook Pro. She literally was editing the video as we went, without leaving set, and without the cumbersome 'log and capture' process.

Explain the workflow.

Sam: Camera/lens were the Panasonic HVX-200 camera with its native lens. Recording with P2 Media, with two 4GB cards (could have used more!) and data transferred to a Mac laptop.

We offlined in Final Cut Pro with the full-res DVCPRO-HD footage, stored on a 1TB LaCie drive. The clips were exported as reference movies from Final Cut Pro into After Effects. After colour correction and VFX were complete, they were rendered out using the Apple animation codec and brought back into FCP for the online. Grading was Adobe After Effects in 16-bit colour space.

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³www.zudeo.com is an online resource for new material. Its HD channel features a trailer for The Ore. Zudeo is based on a bit-torrent distribution model. You have to download a client to receive material ↴