

Q & A with David Jetre and Edgar Pitts

David Jetre is Writer, Director and Producer of “Shroud”. Edgar Pitts is Production Manager, Producer and Post Production Supervisor of “Shroud”.

What are some background details about Jetrefilm Entertainment?

[David Jetre] A lifelong writer and artist, I have always had a weather eye on the film industry. My love of film is extreme and my desire to entertain and educate has always been a priority in my life. My first intersection with film was nearly twenty years ago and, I must confess, it was jarring. I was stunned how cumbersome, inefficient, bloated and bureaucratic the filmmaking process had become. So I decided I would simply wait until the technology made it available for me to develop visual stories on my terms.

Jetrefilm Entertainment was founded upon the idea that a movie should a fun and financially profitable experience, an enjoyable venture that is executed quickly, concisely and without the absurd excesses popular in traditional filmmaking. The crippling vices of vanity, avarice and vulgar mediocrity have utterly destroyed the industry’s credibility, its profitability and its former command within the larger entertainment domain. With decreasingly fewer exceptions, this obsolete system of movie making has fallen from innovation to regurgitation.

Jetrefilm Entertainment is about the future of filmmaking, not the past. We’re about embracing and operating throughout changes in every corner of the technology revolution that is reshaping our cinema: cameras, software, new delivery systems, new synergistic cross-marketing strategies, and above all EFFICIENCY.

But more than all this, we are about telling compelling stories that get people interested in the characters, what they are doing and where they are going. We’re about talking to people about *people*, exploring humanity, and taking everyone somewhere they’ve never been before.

[Edgar Pitts] Jetrefilm Entertainment is a new breed of film production company. The core of our business model and mission statement is to innovate through the use emerging technologies while telling enduring stories. Jetrefilm is built upon our vision to be independent in every sense of the word – independent in resources, direction and implementation, but not in marketability.

I would like to add that David and I have been business partners for many years, and our first venture, which continues to this day, was Design & Technology Consulting Services. DTCS is a full-service advertising and marketing firm that specializes in internet and audio-visual technologies.

It was natural that we transition to feature film because we had all of the high-end expertise in the software packages required. We used our existing industry contacts to fill in gaps for services, such as 3-D animation. Jetrefilm and DTCS are sister companies that will continue to support each other to achieve the highest quality results.

How was “Shroud” chosen to be your first feature film?

[David Jetre] *Shroud* was the most incidental of projects. I remember watching some terrible independent films -- many, unfortunately -- and I remember getting angry. I was like “What is going on? These movies should not be this bad.”

This accusation stems from a basic tenet of mine concerning film: it takes just as long to make a pretty, properly composed frame as it does a bad one. All things being equal: why choose the bad one?

At any rate, one of the films was a western and one was a horror movie. So, I resigned myself to test my theory by blending the genres and demonstrating the ability to make a cogent, interesting, well-written western drama with a hint of horror. Okay, more than a hint.

And it worked beautifully. I meditated on the script for about a month – you know, letting it bounce around my subconscious – and when it was ready I just sat down at Barnes & Noble for four days straight and, by the power invested into me by many a vanilla bean frappuccino, hammered out the script.

I lean toward complex, multi-layered plots, ornate characters and clever reverses of expectation. Consequently, I really wanted to deliver a period drama in the Old West with some strong historical underpinnings.

Again, it paid off beautifully.

What are some of the hurdles of making an independent film?

[Edgar Pitts] Well, that is a loaded question. There are many potential stumbling blocks at every phase from pre-production thru post-production. Since *Shroud* was our first film, our learning curve was steep in the beginning, but with lots of hard work and tireless research, we managed to get ahead of the curve and stay on task.

Managing logistics is key to a successful production. A Producer must be an expert in project management and in understanding how all the pieces fit together. The greatest difficulty for a first time Producer is grasping the importance and value of each of the literally thousands of moving parts. It is extremely important to assemble a competent team, but it is up to the Producer to know what is going on at all times.

Modern filmmaking also requires a deep foundation and mastery of computer software and hardware. *Shroud* was filmed in HD 1080p with 90 hours of source footage, and as such required 8 TB of storage – that’s 8,000 GB or over 11,000 CD-ROMs worth of data. Without proper planning, a production can easily be caught off guard by the sheer volume of data.

[David Jetre] The four greatest challenges in making a film, independent or not, are the same with any daunting venture: finding the money, the time, and the people. The fourth one I’ll talk about in a minute.

Money is actually the easiest thing to find as there is more of it in the world than people. Money buys time and resources. However, the real challenge is finding the people.

It’s *all* about your team – cast and crew.

It doesn't matter how much money or time you got, if you don't have the right people your project will suffer if not fail entirely. Finding the right people is made all the more difficult because of human vanity – everyone believes they are the right person for your project. This brings us to the qualification process, which is the single more important aspect of finding your team.

You got to find the *professionals*.

Mind you, they may cost more, but they are certainly worth it.

The fourth challenge is *resistance*. Strangely, there are just a whole lot of people who don't want you to do whatever it is you want to do, including making movies. It really is amazing how many people want to disrupt, intimidate, obfuscate or hinder the progress of others. A lot of these people are defending dying forms or obsolete business models. They don't want new technology, new channels or new delivery systems. They don't want change. They want to conform you to *their* 20-year old system, whether it's a good one or not.

So we had to avoid all those guys.

In the end, you have to build your team and then overcome all the opposing teams who don't share your vision or innovation.

In a word: *Business*.

How does technology relate to filmmaking?

[Edgar Pitts] Filmmaking today relies heavily on technology, both hardware and software. Even if a movie is captured on traditional film stock, something that is becoming less and less of the norm, it must be scanned and converted to a digital intermediate (DI), so that it can be edited and processed on a computer. As fore mentioned, *Shroud* was acquired in HD, which is already a digital format.

Navigating the film post-production technology landscape can be a very slippery slope. There are many vendors with competing software packages for vastly varying amounts of money that run on Mac, PC and Linux. We chose many software applications from Adobe Systems, including Premiere, After Effects, Encore, Photoshop and Illustrator, as we have been working with these titles for a decade.

You can, of course, pay for time at a local post-house for editing, special effects, color correction and mastering, but if you want any kind of quality control, your bill will be astonishing. That is something that non-independent films do well – write really big checks. We spent over a year on post-production for *Shroud* – In part, because we are perfectionists and demanded the highest level from everyone involved.

There are some great performances in *Shroud*. What are some of your favorite moments?

[David Jetre] Well, I've been told I write a lot of dialogue. So, I am always on the lookout for talented actors who can wrangle through a lot of words, and more importantly, *understand* the highly literate context of what the characters are saying.

Fortunately, we landed some amazing up-and-coming actors as well as some veterans who really showed up, understood the script and sank their teeth into the characters and gave astounding performances.

For the lead we landed the beautiful Nicole Leigh Verdin, an extremely committed actress with a great range of emotion at her command. I don't envy her role in the movie, which included: nine changes of wardrobe, sword combat, hand-to-hand combat, tomahawk fighting, gun play, Latin, and a whole lot of rock climbing in big Victorian dresses. Nicole not only did a fantastic job, she knocked out her dubbing sessions like a champ.

For the main villain, we cast Russell Reynolds, another amazing actor that caught us all off guard. Like Nicole, we are all like "where did this person come from?" Russell showed up, totally inhabited the character, improvised beautifully and brought the bad guy to life with an energy and innovation that put the perfect amount of dread into the film.

In supporting roles, we had strong actors like Charles Baker, Jodie Moore and Larry Jack Dotson as well as many Old West character actors from Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin.

Last but by no means least we were able to work with the amazing Morgana Shaw. A local actress, Morgana brought a commanding performance that really anchors the film.

We plan on inviting all these talented people back for our next films.

Shroud seems to appeal to a diverse group of demographics. Who will be most interested in seeing this film?

[Edgar] With our extensive background in marketing, we understand the importance of appealing to a broad group of demographics. A film without an audience should not be made.

While Shroud has a range of target markets, we believe the following groups will be most interested in seeing the film:

- 1.) Women – The main character is a strong independent woman, who will not play second fiddle to a man or anyone else. She is an elegant Victorian with style and grace.
- 2.) Western – Most men love a good western – a throwback to simpler times and the excitement of the untamed Wild West.
- 3.) Spiritual – The film's central character is a woman of strong faith and convictions. She relies on this for strength and demonstrates it through self-sacrifice.
- 4.) Gothic – The film has a super-natural subtext and should interest those who are fans of the occult, including vampires and the undead.
- 5.) Medieval – Shroud has an interesting 15th century sub-plot that involves historically accurate events and culminates with the main character appearing in full plate armor.

[David Jetre] Everyone. Well, that's my hope. I think good stories transcend borders, boundaries or demographics. If you engage the imagination, bring fresh dialog, good performances and a rich plot, people will be surprised and what they'll find themselves watching.

More to the point, it is about the ultimate demographic -- mankind. Tell stories that everyone can identify with and you don't have to worry about genres and sub-groups.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Most of Shroud was filmed in the state of Texas. Would you recommend Texas as a film location?

[David Jetre] My principal motivation for shooting in Texas was control. It's my back yard. I know the state. Aside from the rich beauty of Texas, one can find almost any location in Texas and shoot there very, very affordably.

Texas' access to all things western and Victorian made the state an easy and accommodating location. We shot in over nine sites in the state and didn't have a single problem: no injuries, accidents or thefts. The famous Southern charm of the people of Texas is immediate and genuine, and afforded us a great deal of latitude with regard to locations, accesses, permits and licenses.

Texas has always viewed itself as a no-nonsense, get-it-done state. That attitude plays perfectly with Jetrefilm's desire for efficiency.

It went so well, in fact, we were invited back by every location and property, some at discounted rates. It really was a joy.

You have created some wonderful online resources to promote the film. Can you provide an overview?

[Edgar Pitts] Before David and I founded Jetrefilm, we created industry leading websites and online resources for many years. So, it was natural that we created a strategic plan and implemented a broad array of internet resources, including stand-alone websites, targeted Myspace pages, Youtube videos and viral seeding.

Starting over a year ago, we implemented viral marketing campaign that utilized the social networking sites and involved creating 5 unique Myspace pages that were targeted towards our 5 key demographics: Women (myspace.com/victorian_elegance), Western (myspace.com/townofshroud), Spiritual (myspace.com/fury_of_angels), Gothic (myspace.com/legend_of_cinecusa) & Medieval (myspace.com/teutonic_knights).

The Myspace pages drive traffic to our viral marketing website (<http://www.WhatIsShroud.com>) This all-Flash website features complex animation and 360° photography from the town of Shroud. As of today, we have received over 40,000 profile views on our Myspace pages and we have about 10,000 friends.

We also created a traditional movie site (<http://www.shroud-movie.com>) to serve as the official website for Shroud. This website features the standard fare including production trailers, photos, film information, cast & crew details and more.

What are some of your upcoming projects?

[David Jetre] I am pretty prolific. My current catalog of intellectual property has about 150 film concepts with several trilogies and some television series thrown in for the mix.

We are currently finalizing the details for our next feature film, which is coming out of development and will officially begin pre-production in a month.

We will be announcing the property chosen in a few weeks.