



SCI-FI CINEMA WITH ALEXA

Set in the near future, *LIFE BEGINS AT REWIREMENT* follows a man named Simon Ender on the day he checks his 100-year-old mother, Jessica, into a revolutionary senior center where elderly minds are uploaded into data banks. The short film was commissioned by the Independent Television Service for the series *FUTURESTATES*, where award-winning filmmakers were asked to take the current state of affairs in the United States and extrapolate them into stories of the not-so-distant future.

Written and directed by Trevin Matcek, the world of *LIFE BEGINS* is warm, organic and grounded in today's reality. The visual design is a mix of eras and styles, from Mid-century Modern to Brutalism and late '70s to early '80s electronic design. "I gravitate towards 'suburban

sci-fi' and telling stories as real as possible. How the kid across the street will deal with technology, rather than heroes in a galaxy far, far away. It is this familiar world where I set *LIFE BEGINS AT REWIREMENT*, on an afternoon that many people from all walks of life, must come to terms with. It's a lived-in place, not slick and effects driven."

Hand-in-hand with showing a world that wasn't dark and apocalyptic, was selecting the ALEXA for its stunning image quality. "I love the patina that the ALEXA has. I wanted *LIFE BEGINS* to have a very natural feel to it and ALEXA has that. It's very filmic and doesn't seem artificial like other digital cameras," says Matcek.

For producer Jennifer Westin, shooting ALEXA brought production values up. "Working with a public television

budget in the sci-fi genre was a challenge, but I knew if we could shoot on an ALEXA it would look amazing," she says.

The camera's dynamic range also helped in keeping costs down. "The latitude that ALEXA has was a huge value in making our small resources stretch," notes cinematographer Jaron Present. "It's by far my favorite camera on the market. Many cameras will go to high ISOs but there is so much noise you can't use them. The ALEXA has both the dynamic range and low noise level to make those high ISOs effective."

Being able to have cinematic image quality and the flexibility to shoot in diverse lighting conditions was in tune with Matcek's filmmaking style. "I like shooting with less light and using darkness to help tell a story. I knew we wouldn't have to worry about noise in the darks and that the highlights would hold up when we were shooting outside during the day. It allowed us to move fast and concentrate on the creative aspects of filmmaking, like capturing the performances and telling a story. I never had to think about whether the images would look good or not. I had faith in my DP and faith in the camera."

Production relied on a lighting package including ARRI LoCasters, HMIs and Studio Cools supplied by Illumination Dynamics (ID). The filmmakers also took advantage of ID's stock of moving lights for the touching scene where Jessica is downloaded. These lights are typically used for live events and concerts, however the director and DP found they afforded a unique look for the film.

Describes Present, "When Jessica is being processed into the computer, it's as if the whole room is a reacting. We lit the room with about ten 'smart lights,' moving lights that threw patterns and colors on the walls. The problem with smart lights usually is they are programmable by computer and it can take a long time to program. You're really at the mercy of the programmer, but Mark Rudge (Director of Automated Lighting) and Robert Reyna (Lighting Board Operator) were so fast. We could change the sequence, illumination level, patterns and the speed of patterns really quickly. We could be creative with the intent of what those light patterns were, rather than waiting on the execution of it."

LIFE BEGINS was shot entirely with the ARRI/Fujinon ALURA 18-80mm zoom. "I'm a huge fan of using zooms as variable primes," says Present. "With a movie like this where you've got a very small amount of time, being able to pop in on the lens for a close-up can make the difference between getting a shot at the end of the day or not. I was extremely impressed not only with the lens'

clarity and color rendition, but with its high speed and lack of lens falloff on the wide end. As time and budgets become more and more impacted, a tool like the ALURA is an indispensable part of the camera order."

Despite the high-tech lighting, the focus was on the actors. "We shot close on a long lens to take you through that scene in a very personal way. It forces you into the world of the characters. The space is really disorienting, but the characters are grounded. The scene was about Simon and Jessica. Even with this complex lighting that we were doing, it was all in support of something very intimate," says the DP.

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For Matcek who worked for years as an editor, recording in natively to ProRes 4444 saved time during the edit and in color correction at Rows of Numbers on DaVinci Resolve. "I've edited jobs with certain cameras where we had to bill a day and half into the job just for transcoding the footage to be able to work with it in an offline format. With ALEXA, it was a drag-and-drop situation. As soon as the files were transferred, we were able to start cutting. When we went to color correction we could just fine tune right away, rather than troubleshooting. We had all this latitude to play around with if we needed to."

Technical discussions aside, the director points out that the tools are there to serve the story. "I think it's less about the resolution of an image and more about the quality and tonality of the image. More K's doesn't necessarily make it better. When you put the images side by side, I go with my gut reaction to the image and how it communicates the emotions of our characters."

LIFE BEGINS AT REWIREMENT premiered at Tribeca Film Festival and is now viewable online at the *FUTURESTATES* website.

For more information, visit: www.arri.com