

# Austin-based Stuck On On Creates Beautiful Haunting Looks for Take Shelter

SCRATCH data workflow and DI tools deliver the power and flexibility to grade and finish critically acclaimed feature

When a film you've visually polished receives rave reviews, and then gets snapped up for global distribution by Sony Pictures Classics, you know you're really on to something. This is exactly the experience of *Stuck On On*, a small Austin, Texas-based post-production facility, which applied a full-on, 2K DPX, SCRATCH DI grade out-of-the box to the Jeff Nichols-directed feature *Take Shelter*.

"*Take Shelter* was the first long-form film project we graded using SCRATCH," says Allison Turrell, executive producer at Stuck On On. The team needed a tool that could maximize their team's creativity by offering sophisticated grading and finishing

tools, while delivering the power to manage multiple versions of high-resolution footage in real-time. "SCRATCH gives us the raw horsepower we need to work on large features. We would never have been able to take on a project like this without it."

*Take Shelter*, was shot on Super 35mm, with 2K DPX scans provided by Deluxe, and VFX sequences delivered by Hydraulx in Santa Monica, Ca.

Interweaving carefully crafted narrative looks, *Take Shelter*, which had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival 2011, is the story of a working-class husband and father, played by Michael Shannon, who questions whether his terrifying dreams are a signal of something real to come, or the onset of an inherited mental illness he's feared his entire life. The various color palettes of the final movie, enhanced during collaborative grading sessions in SCRATCH, caused The Hollywood Reporter to remark on the film's "impeccable craftsmanship and breathtaking imagery."

## Look and Cinematography

Color grading is an art form where, in an ideal world, the colorist, director and cinematographer work together in creative harmony. Stuck On On colorist Parke Gregg applauds the

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Sony Pictures Classics

the creative benefits enabled by SCRATCH, and its ability to wrangle the narrative threads together on *Take Shelter* during grading sessions with director Nichols and cinematographer Adam Stone. "SCRATCH is very powerful, allowing you to place different formats in the same timeline – DPX or RED 4K files, temp shots, VFX comps, and QuickTimes. The CONstruct interface lets you save and play different versions of these timelines, and you can turn grading effects off and on without ever rendering, so it's easy to jump between different versions. SCRATCH enabled a highly collaborative environment, which significantly increased our creativity and productivity."

Parke says: "Jeff and Adam are visually talented people. The hallmark of this project was its look and cinematography – it's not a genre film, but has the trappings of a thriller, a horror, a family drama, as well as being a beautiful art film. So we started the grade by applying several different LUTs, created for us by Light Illusion, to rope the footage into these various looks."

"As part of the story is based in reality – a small US town, with intimate family scenes – they really wanted to push the warm hues, to make the imagery feel very comfortable and engender

a sense of togetherness. But these are juxtaposed sometimes with very subtle transitions to the nightmares and hallucinations of the main character, often involving dramatic storm clouds. So in the color grading, we would push the blacks and darks to build a foreboding atmosphere and deepen the thriller aspect of these scenes."

However, Parke says he did need to radically amend the color of certain shots, and again, SCRATCH was with him every step of the way. "Some of the night scenes were shot with blue gels, but in the grade Jeff didn't like the look. By combining vectors and selective-area keying, SCRATCH allowed me to remove the blue light without affecting other areas of the image. This was a huge asset."

#### Visual Effects and Finishing

Parke also highlights a VFX scene in *Take Shelter* that demonstrates SCRATCH's ability to go beyond grading with the use of plug-ins. A house is sucked up into the air by a tornado, along with a spiral of furniture as it plummets back down to earth. The scene is intercut with tight facial close-ups.

"Hydraulx did a great job on the VFX, and a particular shot needed a little massaging to integrate properly with the sequence," says Parke. "After doing a color pass to match the VFX shots with the film source material, I used SCRATCH to introduce subtle camera moves on the animated material. Further to this, I also used Sapphire plug-ins from GenArts to add light rays to enhance the

atmosphere, and a built-in tool to clean-up specks of dust."

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"All of this happened literally before we mastered. Being able to do this sort of work in one tool, in the same pass, before rendering out, and then create a QT for approval, is amazing. We could keep the project live to the very end, and continue fine-tuning and finishing."

Looking at the larger picture and the company's prospects for attracting new business, Turrell says, "Every single project is totally unique - with different people, editing styles, VFX and workflows every time. As a facility we're dealing with a moving target. So you have to offer a holistic solution to deal with each project in the best possible way, and SCRATCH is at the core of our services."

"A lot of people are shooting full-on, beautifully-lit, high-quality movies using digital cameras like RED and Alexa. With SCRATCH they can maximize the full latitude of the footage, and we can give them a full-quality finishing service that makes their movie stand out. Since completing *Take Shelter*, we've worked with two first-time filmmakers who have shot using the RED ONE 4K camera. We're doing all the finishing for them and defining narrative threads through the use of color in SCRATCH, and it's pretty awesome."

Writer-director Jeff Nichols talks about "Take Shelter" [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)



Image courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics