



POWER TO THE CREATORS

Love, Wasps, and Horror Defined by Peter Hacker in SCRATCH

At-Home Studios with SCRATCH Enable Profitable Business

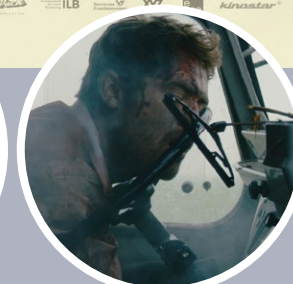
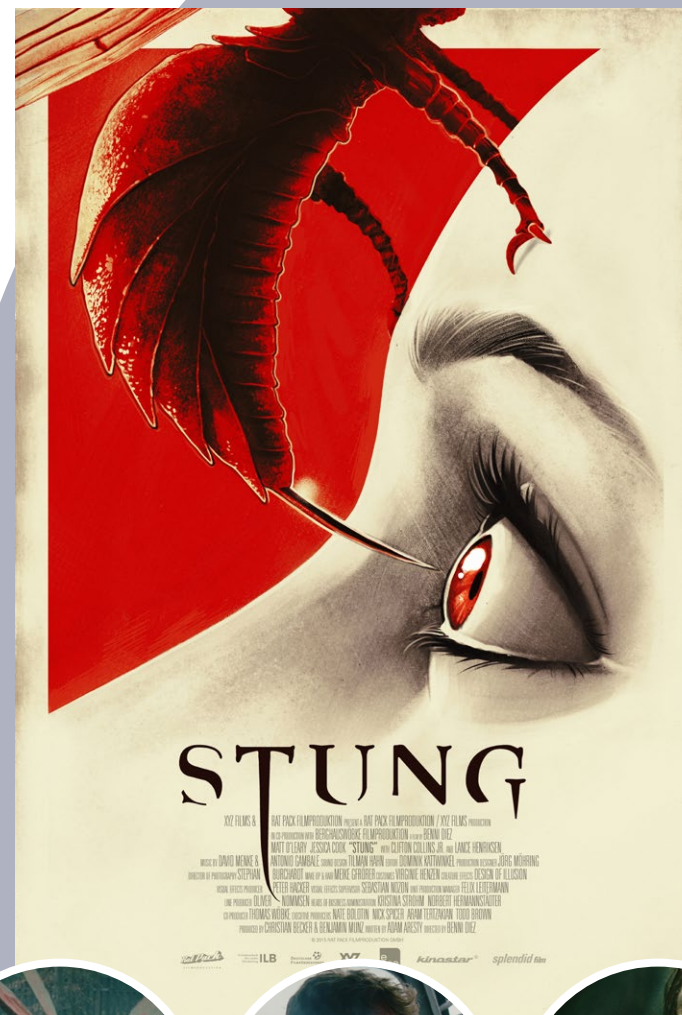
In a recent interview, freelance colorist **Peter Hacker** (<http://www.fatrat.de>) discussed the challenges and workflow of the creature feature “Stung” (2015), a horror love story with wasps, which had its German premiere at the FantasyFilmFest in Berlin on August 14, 2015.

Rat Pack Films’ & XYZ Films’ production of “Stung” is a tribute to the golden age of VHS, boasting the bold colors and campy look of the 1980’s horror film genre, while tailored to the taste of today’s audiences. It’s proof positive that monster movies still exist in the world of low-budget horror.

The ARRI Alexa 2k with Hawk Anamorphic Lenses were used to shoot the film. The visual impact of anamorphic lenses produces breathtaking intensity, which was ideal for the strong color definition of the 1980’s look and feel.

Hacker custom built his own compositing/grading workstation, equipped with an NVidia 760GTX, an internal hardware RAID for storage, and some SSDs for real-time playback. The calibrated NEC LCD monitors are supported by a Sony OLED screen to accurately judge the final color grading.

With a strong background in visual effects and compositing, Hacker was hired to be the VFX producer and compositor for “Stung.” Hacker has several years experience in color grading, working on numerous commercials for household brands like





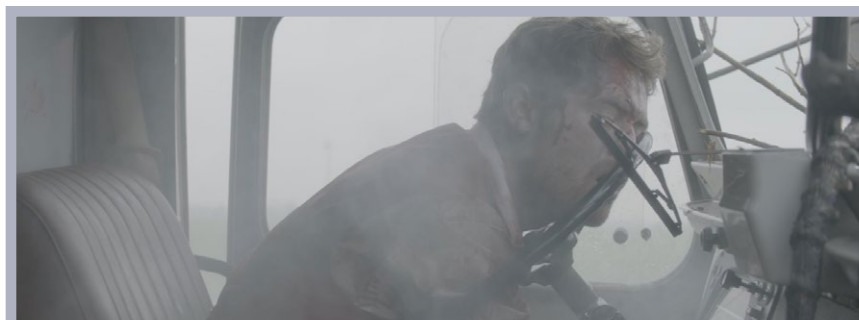
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Mercedes, Audi, and Fanta, a few indie features, and numerous shorts. In collaboration with Benni Diez (director) and Sebastian Nozon (VFX Supervisor) he took over the post production management of the movie. He was also in charge of preparing all the footage for the VFX shots and handed it over to the remotely working animation, rigging, modeling and compositing artists. Furthermore, he developed the movie's look and was intensively involved in the compositing of more than one hundred shots. However, schedule conflicts with the original color-grading team required a new plan, and Hacker took on the color grading and finishing of the film as well.

“ We had our choice of numerous grading systems but I found SCRATCH to be the most straightforward tool suite. As a freelancer working on a large variety of imagery projects, it has all the real-time functions I need. ”

ASSIMILATE's SCRATCH was Hacker's weapon of choice for the entire post production of "Stung". "As a student I had worked in SCRATCH at Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg (<http://www.filmakademie.de>) and really dug into fully learning the system. We had our choice of numerous grading systems but I found SCRATCH to be the most straightforward tool suite. And I still feel that way. As a freelancer working on a large variety of imagery projects, it has all the real-time functions I need – conform, color grading, versioning, and finishing – as well as some unique bells and whistles like VR capability. And it's now at a price I can personally afford, which means that I, as well as all indie productions, can set up an at-home studio and have a second license on the laptop for hitting the road. That's phenomenal for creating a profitable business."

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“For ‘Stung’ I created different looks during the first two days of grading because I didn’t have LUTs as a reference. It’s easy to create multiple looks for review in SCRATCH because of its speed and performance. Those LUTs are now in my archive for possible future use. Then I created a separate SCRATCH CONstruct (timeline) with all the movie’s master shots to ensure the look would work and to allow me to track the changes within the story, which were bound to occur due to changes of the seasons and different weather/lighting conditions within a sequence.”

“The horror film genre is synonymous with low-budget production with no wiggle room, so we had to be very innovative with our workflow solutions, locations, and the challenges of working and reviewing shots remotely. The movie was shot in Berlin; the editing by Dominik Kattwinkel and Benni Diez took place in Cologne as well as the animation by Waldemar and Harry Fast; compositing, lighting and rendering was done in Berlin by Sebastian Nozon and Sascha Geddert; and I was doing parts of the compositing and finally grading the entire movie in Ludwigsburg. To make all the data transfer possible among those numerous locations we used BTSync, which kept us all in synch without a hassle.”

“During editing the number of VFX shots increased from 150 to a staggering 600. I had 8Tb of storage for the Alexa material and some RED footage from the pick-up shoot. There were 1,600 edits in the film that runs for 84 minutes, so that gives you an idea of the project’s heavy workload – and all while being on a tight budget. To ensure the data’s safety we had back-up RAIDs set up at several locations spread over the country. Furthermore, we separated the data being worked on from the back-ups, and scheduled the day’s work to back up during the night.”

“With a couple weeks left until delivery, the rendered shots (JPEGs, in the end replaced by DPXs) were transferred from Berlin and Cologne to me in Ludwigsburg where I dropped them into the timeline, which is easily done in SCRATCH. With peer-to-peer uploaded previews of the film, or just smaller sequences, we all were continually on the same page. A lot of Skype calls took place to discuss all the details

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in our review sessions. Two weeks before delivery we all came together in a small office space in Ludwigsburg to finish the compositing. At that time I switched from compositing to color grading for twelve straight days in a darkened tent in the corner of the room. It was a cheerful time with all of us finally sharing the same space and adding some final touches or even bringing some sequences to life for the first time. For viewing pleasure, I brought in my 55-inch Sony TV for a few relaxed reviews, which also sped up the process and helped to keep the budget in line.”

“In these sessions with director Benni Diez, we were sitting back-to-back in the same room. It was very helpful that he could view and judge the color grading in real time on a separate monitor without the need to watch over my shoulder all the time. It was also crucial for all the VFX shots – Diez and Nozon immediately could discuss how they looked with the grading applied. It’s always a big challenge when it comes to CGI content being integrated into live action back plates. With the different nature of the content, they either fit together even better after the grading is applied, or not.



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Once in a while we had shots working completely fine in comps, but they got torn apart in the grading. Altogether, it was a magical experience to see all the elements come together right before your eyes, and literally any changes could be made on the fly.”

“There are a few key aspects of SCRATCH that are really important for me. For conforming the naming systems make the templates/files/versions easy to track, especially for a VFX-driven feature like ours in which the pipeline is essential. It’s easy to copy the files and ship them off to others for review. Next time we will be using SCRATCH Web for remote review, which will simplify the whole post even more. A killer feature, which I intensively used, was the ability to continue working while SCRATCH was rendering in the background – that’s a huge timesaver and I wouldn’t like to work without it. With one click, SCRATCH will render my timeline to DPX and jpegs and perceived 500 other formats – awesome. And with the powerful OFX plug-ins, which I can also use in Nuke, it gets even better and better. In the end, the right tools enable the post artist to do his/her best work.”

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See “Stung”, the trailer at:
<http://trailers.apple.com/trailers/ifcfilms/stung>

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/getstung