

# Filming in the street

**Geoff Boyle is about to embark on shooting *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*. In the first part of his diary, he outlines the prep involved in the Bangkok-based shoot.**

Article first published: March/April 2008



When I told Steve I'd be away for four months and out of touch, the inevitable "why?" question appeared. "Well, I'm prepping and then shooting a movie". "So do you want to write about the prep?" "Err, OK."

Unlike my last two movies, which were shot on the Grass Valley Viper, with contributions from early versions of the Silicon Imaging and Phantom HD cameras (*Mutant Chronicles*) and the SI-2K and Red One cameras (*Dark Country*), this one (*Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*) I'm shooting on film – and lots of it!

The first thing to say is that this film bears absolutely no connection or resemblance to the previous *Street Fighter* movie! We're shooting in Thailand with some sequences based in Vancouver and Hong Kong, but the majority of the movie is based in Bangkok, and that's where I'll be living for four months. I have six weeks of prep and then nine weeks shooting. We're trying to stick to five day weeks as much as possible, and from the current schedule it looks as if we may well manage that!

The director, Andrzej Bartkowiak, is not just a director, but a bloody good cinematographer, with director of photography credits that include *Species*, *Speed*, *Falling Down* and *Lethal Weapon 4*. This could be fun. Production designer Michael Hanan's credits include *The Punisher*, *Blow* and *Ronin*! So I have a director who understands my job and a designer who should make my life very easy. What more can I want?

This is where it starts to get more interesting. I've received agreement to bring in my choice of operator, Chris McGuire, to fly the MK-V-AR steadicam rig, but all the rest of my crew will be local. Whoa! What about my gaffer? No, they've got a great local gaffer. Err...

## Prepping

I guess this is where Steve wants me to describe what I actually do during the prep period. The first thing is to watch every film the director has made, again and again. This is to try and get a feel for what he likes and his general approach. Next, read the script again and again – in this case not such a good idea, as the script I have was locked in early November and hasn't changed because of the writers' strike. I will apparently get the updated version in a few days.

You form images in your mind of what each scene will look like, both from the script and from discussions with Andrzej and Michael. This is where we start to part from the script – the dark, dirty, messy police office is now a marvel of high tech! You also talk, and talk and talk, about films, images of all kinds, places you've been, things you've seen, steaks, wine: exchanging references as much as possible so that you all have the same approach. You then start the business of visiting every possible location, often several times, to see what will work, what you can shoot here, when you can shoot here; the narrow streets look great back-lit but they're only that way for a very short time each day and you need to know when. Michael is telling us what he can hide, what he can add, what he can alter.

Occasionally you walk in to a location and just go, wow! Yes! I want to shoot here. You then have to approach the logistics of the location. Can I park the gennies? Does the light move in the right direction? Will those towers support my lights or do I have to bring in cranes and cherry pickers? How long will it take to rig? Can I get the crane up those stairs and through that door, or can I remove the door?

Of course every other department is doing exactly the same thing.

Michael comes up and says, have you thought about...? Oh yes! Great idea, but wait a minute! Aren't built-in 8ft long florry tubes part of design and therefore part of your budget? Especially 60 of them...

While you're doing this, you're also trying to produce lists of camera equipment and lenses and also lighting and grip requirements, as well as details of the film stock that will be needed. So it's five cameras: main unit, three Arricam LTs, and action unit a 435 and a 235; then we've got the MK-V-AR, the GF8 extra crane, the Tecno Crane, the CableCam rig. Oh yes! I want CableCam, the end sequence of the film cries out for it – a shot that starts way up in the air and plummets to the ground while crossing a huge harbor area, buildings blowing up all around it!

Now I have to order enough lenses to cover it all. I go from 10mm to 600mm, with a huge collection of primes and zooms in between. Of course, since I got my contract for this job, I've been talking to DPs and ACs who have worked with Andrzej in the past. What's he like? Does he flip? Does he make impossible demands? The responses are positive... well, mainly; he'll want to be shooting fast and gets impatient if he has to wait. I don't have a problem with that – hate waiting myself! One comment from an AC – well, he was an AC when I worked with him, he's an op now – was, get ready to shoot a lot and fast – 28,500 feet on his first day on his last movie! Be prepared for a co-DP. Well, after years of working with Donovan and then Bailey, I'm used to that!

Stock has to be ordered well in advance. How much do I need of the various stocks? How on earth can I tell you when the script isn't finished and the locations aren't finalized? Oh, take this as a preliminary list. This list has nearly 500,000 feet of film on it, a mixture of mainly Fuji stocks – and that's an interesting tale on it's own. Why am I using Fuji? The simple answer is that they make a range of stocks with different looks, whereas all Kodak stocks look pretty much the same now. I want a high contrast high saturation stock for the day street scenes, a low saturation, low contrast stock for the opening sequences, a stock that is very tolerant of mixed color temperatures for another sequence, so when I come to choose the stock for the night sequences it just makes sense to stay with Fuji.

Why do I care about the film stocks when we're going for a DI anyway? Well, I want to get as close to the final look as I can without the digits. And we're getting film prints of the 'A' camera rushes. Wow! I haven't had that for 15 years. I love the idea of seeing what I shot without anyone interfering. I was at the lab yesterday setting up tests for Monday, where we'll establish the printer lights to be used for the film. I don't want graded rushes, I want to see what I'm shooting. We've agreed to do the same for the video rushes – they'll line up on my chart and touch nothing until they see another chart. Yes, I am putting my balls on the line!

I'm also trying to take a more dangerous/adventurous route to lighting the film. I'm aiming for a much more contrasty, less 'lit' look than Andrzej's previous films, but am relying on handheld China Balls being flown in everywhere to make the stars look perfect, wherever they are. I hope my sparks are fit!

Halfway through prep and there is an enormous amount to do. We've just started the tech reces, as locations are locked. I go out with my gaffer and key grip and do the detailed work of exactly where lamps go, where cables run, where gennies park. This is so that we can have rigging crew going before and after us, installing and ripping out kit. It's the only way we can meet the schedule.

Ah, now that brings me to an interesting point. We have an action unit. These are the guys who will shoot the detail of the fights. The main unit shoots the sync pieces and the establishing material, but then the action unit takes over. They tend to get two to three times the time the main unit has with each location they're involved in. This means I have to plan for lighting being moved in and out of many locations at the same time. The great news is that the action unit DP is staggeringly experienced – Igor Meglic: *Resident Evil*, *Bourne Ultimatum*, *Rush Hour*... I'm now reviewing operators' showreels. The big problem here that as they're all Thai and they are also DPs. Hmm, what is this reel meant to show!?

I've included a bunch of stills. This is very much part of the prep process. These are all possible, but not definite locations. Also, they'll look nothing like this in the film. Hey Steve, a competition! Spot the location in the movie – anyway, I shoot the stills, grade them and print them on a Canon Selphy printer, so we can pass around postcards.

I think that's it. It's Saturday, the one day a week I can drink! Oh! I missed a vital part of prep, 30 minutes each day in the gym on the cardio program. I need to be fit at the start of the film!!



## Geoff Boyle

**Reel Show cinematography editor Geoff Boyle's recent feature films as director of photography include *The Mutant Chronicles*, *Dark Country* and, currently, *Street Fighter 2*. He received his first camera, a Brownie 127, when he was eight. From then on the future was clear. After art school in the late 60s, he worked as a stills assistant. One day he was asked if he knew anyone who could film a concert. Of course he did! He moved into film and shot documentaries for TV, 10 years or so of 20/20 for ABC and a lot of music videos. In 1985 he shot a 'making of' about the Pirelli calendar. Terence Donovan liked the way he lit and asked him if he shot commercials. From 1990 to 2005, he has shot almost entirely commercials, with occasional sidetrips into drama, a short he shot – *About A Girl* – winning a BAFTA in 2001. He also shot special effects on *Enemy at the Gates*, won the SMPTE Eastman Gold medal in 2000 and was made a fellow of the BKSTS that year. He started the cinematography mailing list (CML) in 1996 with 60 members. It now has over 3,000 members in 148 countries and is acknowledged as the pre-eminent internet site for cinematography.**