

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS STATEMENT

Inglourious Basterds, mechanical and visual effects.

Quentin Tarantino was very critical of the “authenticity” of all aspects of “Inglourious Basterds”. As a result we dedicated ourselves to doing as much of the effects work as possible “in camera”.

The visual effects for the Farmhouse included blue screen cows added into exterior plates. In some cases those plates were blue screened into interior windows. The mechanical effects for the both the Farmhouse sequence and the Basement Tavern gunfight sequence required principal actors being very close to the “bullet hits”. Their detonation was choreographed precisely. An exact line up of the angle of the gun, the timing of the muzzle flash and the bullet impact were critical. The choreography also had to stand up to extreme slow motion and multiple camera angles on the same action. Quentin Tarantino “...a million splinters in extreme slow motion.” Our unprotected actors had to perform in the middle of this maelstrom. This required a unique “bullet hit” design. We used two charges per bullet hole, first a lighter charge to clean the sculptured bullet hole with a system to pull the wire back after detonating, so that it was invisible and then electronically triggered 1/200sec later a stronger charge to empty the reservoir of its balsa wood splinters and dust. As violent as they looked, one could lean on these areas during discharge without being harmed, even with an exposed face.

A fire in the Nazi filled cinema is the climax of the story. The screen catches fire while the projection is still visible; the fire then leaps through areas of the cinema, leaving a wall of fire where the screen burned away, ending in a roll of smoke from the room behind the screen with the projection still visible on the smoke. As with all the effects sequences Quentin preferred to have it all happen in camera. This necessitated balancing the brightness of the projected image to the brightness of the fire. Mechanical effects came up with chemistry to produce a proper colour flame that was reduced in brightness. By overlaying the images from multiple digital projectors we were able to get a brightness balance between the projected image and the fire, which was consuming the screen. Special screen material controlled the rate at which the screen burned. The action from the projection before the burn all the way through to the entire theatre being engulfed in fire with 130 stunt performers try to flee the inferno was shot as a single piece. To achieve the projection on smoke following the big burn we built an inverted ¼ scale version of the theatre interior and released vapour produced by liquid nitrogen. We projected the face onto the vapour from the front and projected the fire onto the back of the vapour. The final explosion of the theatre’s exterior was all practical including the stunt performer riding a bicycle three meters from the exploding façade.

Inglourious Basterds includes considerably more effects work. I regret that there simply isn’t space to describe or even make a comprehensive list within the five hundred-word limit.