



Red Cliff gets the Park Road treatment

All-time Chinese box office success rocks with Genetic Engineering workflow and Pablo DI



Released in July 2008, Red Cliff, Director John Woo's (Mission Impossible 2, Broken Arrow, Face Off) epic story of the final days of the Han Dynasty in China and the beginning of the Three Kingdoms period, shot to stratospheric success, supplanting even the mighty Titanic at the very top of the all-time box office takings list in China.

Written by Woo and Khan Chan, Red Cliff's script called for monumental battle scenes and sweeping, heroic vistas to match the very best of Hollywood for a movie produced by Beijing Film Studio and China Film Group, and shot on location in China. But when it came to the VFX and DI, Woo turned Red Cliff into a truly global project by placing VFX work with The Orphanage in San Francisco, USA, sound with Australian company Soundfirm, and the DI with Park Road Post Production in Wellington, New Zealand.



“

Pablo allowed us to experiment solutions, giving our clients real creative options without wasting valuable time.”

David Hollingsworth,
Senior Colorist,
Park Road Post Production

”

So why New Zealand, and Park Road? Simply because Park Road Post Production, set up by renowned director Peter Jackson, is one of the world's most advanced DI houses with a track record of producing stunning results – while keeping its clients all the time closely involved with the job as it progresses. Park Road was brought on board early in the production of Red Cliff not only as the lead DI house, but also as the hub where all the picture components of the film would be brought together, and the multitude of film and video deliverables produced.

Bringing it all together

Park Road's General Manager, Aimee McCammon travelled to Beijing in 2007 to talk the producers through the process that Park Road would apply to complete the film. “We worked closely with the producers in bringing on board the other facilities that provided services for the project, ensuring that the workflow could meet the project's ambitious deadline and standards,” remembers McCammon.

“We would be dealing with material from all different parts of the world,” she adds. “Live action from files processed and scanned in Beijing, VFX from San Francisco, sound from Sydney, and of course we would be bringing it all together here in New Zealand.”

Shared workflow

Red Cliff is in fact a two part movie – with Part Two planned for release this year – and a third ‘combined’ version for later international release. For Part One, all the scanning of the 35mm original camera negative took place at Hualong, a film post facility in Beijing. The 2K scanned data was then shipped to Wellington for the conform, with the 2K VFX shots arriving from San Francisco.

“Then we got to the fun part of the project – doing the DI color grade with the Director of Photography, Lu Yue,” remembers Senior Colorist, David Hollingsworth. “At Park Road we have two Quantel Pablo systems which share material and workflow via a Quantel Genetic Engineering set up. This made the job a dream as we could freely bounce between rooms at any stage of the job – looking at the conform and VFX in one suite then walking down the corridor to the DI theater for the color grade.”

Creative options

“The sheer scale and grand nature of the project really pushed the Park Road DI department's talent,” remembers Hollingsworth with a smile on his face, “and the Pablo was a fantastic companion for the ride. We could try different looks and treatments interactively as we went along, and apply them across any selected clips near-instantaneously.

“For example, there's this epic battle scene which spans the course of a day – however in reality, the footage was captured over six months in varying light conditions, weather conditions and even seasons – the Pablo allowed us to experiment solutions, giving our clients real creative options without wasting valuable time.”

The full DI

But it was not only in the color grading that Pablo was able to offer the client options and flexibility. “Because the Pablo is not only a top color correction system but also has a full DI toolset built in, we were able to offer paint-out fixes, instant resizes and alternate versions, all live with the DoP as the job went along and without having the delays and expense of offloading material to another system first. That's a tremendous advantage for us, and makes the whole DI process seem effortless for the client. It all adds up to a much more creative environment where we can concentrate on the content rather than the mechanics. I think that shows in the fantastic quality of the end result we achieved together,” says Hollingsworth.



At a glance

- John Woo's Red Cliff is China's biggest ever box office hit
- Park Road Post Production in Wellington, New Zealand acted as the DI hub for the project
- Ambitious timescales were met with stunning quality results
- Two Pablos and Genetic Engineering formed the backbone of the production workflow
- Park Road has recently completed Red Cliff's second instalment in Beijing, as well as a combined version for international release

Finishing the job

The Park Road team have recently returned from Beijing where they completed the grade for the film's second instalment. The distance proved no barrier for Senior Colorist Clare Burlinson and Editor Shanon Moratti; "Having the Pablo system in Hualong meant that we could literally walk off the plane and start working," remembers Moratti.

Subtitles were also part of the specification – in English and Simplified Mandarin. These were simply rendered out through the Pablo, as were the 4x3 and 16x9 HD deliverables – in realtime from the finished 2K data held within the Pablo.

The secret sauce

So what's Park Road's recipe for success? "Working closely with the Chinese production team from the start enabled us to develop a solid workflow that allowed Park Road to deliver the film to the highest quality against a very challenging deadline," reflects McCammon. "The Pablos and Genetic Engineering shared workflow are central to that, alongside the enormous creative talent we have on board at Park Road.

Raising the bar

"Working on Red Cliff has been a great experience and something we are extremely proud of. It's a huge project with a massive number of live action and VFX shots. It's got plenty of technical ambition which really saw our team raise the bar in terms of technical creativity," McCammon concludes.