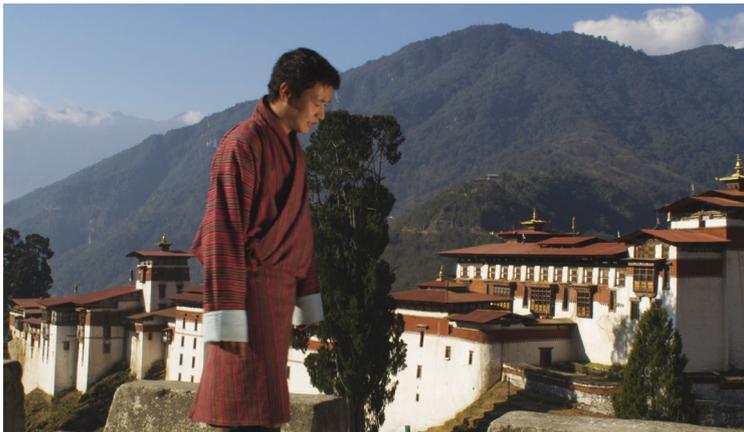




ARROWS OF THE THUNDER DRAGON



Shot on RED 4.5k in widescreen (2.40)
Running time including credits - 91 minutes
Language - Dzongka with English subtitles and English narration.
Grading and DCP mastering: DIGITAL PICTURES
Sound Post & 5.1 Mix: SOUNDFIRM

Director - GREG SNEDDON.
Producer (Bhutan) - TSHERING DORJI.
Cinematographer - LEKI DORJI.
Editor - JILL BILCOCK.



SYNOPSIS

Set in the 1970s, the story follows brother and sister Kuenphen and Jamyang where in a remote Bhutanese village, they learn traditional archery from their old warrior grandfather. The respected but eccentric old man uses a heavy hand and strict discipline to train the young Kuenphen in the art of traditional archery.

It becomes clear Kuenphen has opportunities to further his interests while sister Jamyang must stay home to weave, cook and get married; a fate the young woman is not willing to accept without a fight.

When Kuenphen has to leave the village to take his mother on a 3 day walk to the old castle for medical treatment, Jamyang's own desire to explore a wider world other than the norm of following her mothers traditional life is stimulated.

Filmed entirely on location in the breathtaking Himalaya mountains, the actors are made up of local highland village people. The 'ordinary' current traditional mediaeval life in tiny isolated Bhutan is fascinating and anything but ordinary from a modern western point of view.

Featuring current members of the famous Bhutanese Olympic women's archery team who will be seen competing at the London Olympic Games, this beautiful story from the ancient Buddhist Kingdom that aims for 'Gross National Happiness', examines the gentle toughness required to overcome all odds - and win at what means most.



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GREG SNEDDON



Born: 25/01/1954

Film & Television director, producer, writer, composer and musician.

Post Graduate Diploma in Film & Television in 1976 from Swinburne University, the best film school in Australia.

Fellow of the Australia Council for the Arts.

Honorary member, Monash University Human Ethics Committee.

Worked on many major mini-series and television series as composer.

1999-2001 ordained as a Buddhist monk.

For over 20 years worked regularly with one of Australia's most awarded theatre companies; 'Somebody's Daughter Theatre'. Over this time 200 songs have been performed publicly before many audiences including at Parliament House Canberra, at both Victorian and NSW parliament houses and at all the major theatre venues in Victoria.

For two years I taught at Beechworth High School, leading classes on non-violence and ways of reducing domestic violence.

At the beginning of 2005 I was invited to join the Standing Committee for Ethical Research involving Humans as an honorary staff member and 'religious representative' at Monash University.

Authorised teacher in Buddhist philosophy and practice at 'Shen Pen Ling' Buddhist centre.

2011 Completed 50min Oratorio for orchestra, choir and soloists "The Life of Jane"

2011 -2012 Four trips to Bhutan to research, write and shoot cinema feature "Arrows of the Thunder Dragon"



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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The line between explaining too much of the subtle still-living ancient Buddhist culture of Bhutan (and thus losing the magic) versus explaining too little (and possibly losing the audience) - has been on my mind throughout the project.

With a creative background as composer/songwriter, the rhythm and flow of the story and the poetry of the script was important for me. Also blending with some surprises, the old and the new.

When Jill was cutting the film she was surprised at the shock when we see the bus station and Kuenphen jumps onto a noisy 1970's bus. But this is Bhutan! Cut barley by hand, carry it in wicker baskets on women's backs, then answer the mobile phone when it rings. Even the Lama/monks who do the astrology and rituals have mobile phones. That's how you make a booking these days I am told.

If something gets me emotionally, then I assume at least some other people will also be moved. I find Arrows of the Thunder Dragon very moving in an underplayed way. When we have fine-tuned the film in post and are finished, I trust others will also find this simple piece touches them.

Something like this 'personal enjoyment' philosophy is really the only benchmark I have used to measure Arrows. To construct a film others will appreciate, but that would tell the fundamental story at the heart of the work's original concept and at the same time find a satisfying place within my own very private spiritual journey.

So from my point of view as writer/director, I think of Arrows as a work of art. Once finished it will represent the best I can do at this time as an artist to tell this story. Then I will let it go, as it will be done.

Labelling the film a work of art I can find both a place in it as a creative, as well as in the future (I hope) some distance from it as a finished work. It can then be called good or bad in the eyes of the beholder; I expect both reactions, and I will be happy.

The Bhutanese were great to work with, once we understood each other. More to the point once I understood the subtleties of how to remain polite and get things done. Once the talented team supplied by producer T.D. Dorji understood that we really had to get through scenes in the time allotted each day, we did exactly that.

The standard method of making films in Bhutan does not involve actors having seen any part of the script before arriving on set. This is a little disturbing to begin with, until one becomes used to the idea. Rehearsing a scene, a concept taken for granted elsewhere, is quite unusual in Bhutan I found. The actors and crew were very keen to learn and really good to work with. I fear they may not be as kind in what they say about me! I love having fun on set, but only as part of getting the scene in the can. Fun in the sense of not being focussed on the job, drives me nuts. So I went nuts a few times, in a polite Buddhist kind of way of course.



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Going to Bhutan as a tourist as I did during the research phase of the film, then again several times as director during the production phase, was very different. The Bhutanese are like sweet tasting steel. Smiling, fair, gentle, kind - and very tough.

Making a film that would be acceptable to the Bhutanese censors has been not without challenges.

While I have felt comfortable as an artist making *Arrows* in collaboration with a willing Bhutanese coproducer, there has been a constant self-imposed requirement to be sensitive to the need for any political Bhutanese films - or even subtle social statements about modern Bhutan - to come from the Bhutanese directors of the future, not some blow-in five-minute-expert from Australia.

I believe our role as western film-makers going into a developing country should be to help people develop the skill with worlds-best-practice film techniques and equipment, to tell their own stories eloquently.

In some ways what one imagines happens after the end of the film is for me quite sad. Jamyang becomes westernised; replacing her beautiful traditional costume for jeans and Nike shoes on her way to the Olympics in Brazil. The old ways of the warrior have died with Grandfather. Mother's weaving loom will gather dust as Indian and Chinese-made cloth replaces the hand woven material. Is this good?

It is difficult to find anything wrong with 'progress' in our global free-market economy. There are so many positives - education, improvement in medicine and so forth. For me though I wish the best of the old and only the best of the new could co-exist in next generation Bhutan. Maybe this is what the film is about.

—
Greg, 16 August, 2012



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PRODUCERS STATEMENT

BACKGROUND

Travelling to Bhutan in 2010 for the first time, I became certain there was an important film waiting to happen. The audience demographic picking up eco-travellers, Western and Asian Buddhists, those interested in ancient warrior cultures, traditional archery or archery in general, and so forth. As the film has no violence or sex scenes, it is suitable for a wide market. The introduction of an only lightly explained 'after death' sequence may need some additional support. Further lines of narration and a new monologue scene by Grandfather have been recorded and are waiting to be put in to help this along a little.

I feel Arrows of the Thunder Dragon could have a good chance of being played in China and throughout Asia. My argument for this is that although many people may not know it, Bhutan has traditionally been an 'enemy' of Tibet, having repelled many attempted invasions by Tibetan warriors over the hundred's of years since Bhutan became an independent country. So there should be no issue in it being screened in Beijing.

Yet at the same time the old Bhutanese traditions have come from many Tibetan Buddhist similarities. I've shown footage we shot in the Bhutan monasteries and nunnery to Tibetan Buddhist experts here, who say while the language is different (Dzongkha not Tibetan) they recognise the rituals as being the same.

While the Chinese were preparing to develop nuclear weapons in the early 1970s, the Bhutanese were maintaining their remarkable history of having never having been successfully invaded, using single-shot rifles and bamboo bows and arrows.

Only two feature films have come out of Bhutan to date, 'The Cup' and 'Travellers and Magicians', both produced and crewed by westerners. Experienced Bhutanese producer and co-producer on Arrows of the Thunder Dragon Tshering (T.D.) Dorji, complained to me that Bhutanese filmmakers were disgruntled that the Western crews came in, shot and left, without helping advance the skills of talented and enthusiastic local Bhutanese film crews.

I was determined to make an international-grade cinema feature DOP'd and crewed by a 100% Bhutanese team. This was greeted with a surprising level of excitement by the entire Bhutanese film making community. For the first time local Bhutanese directors and producers could come and watch and take part in making a film using the latest technology, which they did.

Since Arrows has finished production, I understand several of the local director/producers have embarked on projects armed with a developed skill set thanks to T.D.'s generosity in allowing them to be involved in this project.



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PRODUCTION FUNDING TO DATE AND PRODUCER'S PERSONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT.

I have so far self-funded the film in partnership with co-producer T.D. Dorji. All production decisions with regards both creative and financial, are my responsibility. T.D. has been responsible for organising and paying for all-things Bhutanese: the cast, crew, locations, transport/accommodation and local permissions.

No application has been made to any body or institution for funding, before this current Screen Australia post-production application.

T.D. and I have a simple agreement that divides any producer's net profit received after all expenses are accounted for, between his company and mine, in a 50-50 split. As all the post has been to date and will continue to take place in Australia only, no money from the Screen Australia submission should it be successful, will be paid to any company or person outside Australia.

CREW AND EQUIPMENT CHALLENGES

Production went surprisingly smoothly given that talented DOP Leki Dorji and crew had no training or understanding of conventional production protocols.

When T.D. Dorji and I agreed to produce a film together, my initial idea was to have a Bhutanese director, DOP, crew and editor do the entire shoot and edit in Bhutan. I would supply a script that was suitable to release into the international market, and take on final finish in Australia, which I knew could not be done in Bhutan.

As the script drafts began arriving to him via email, T.D. politely pleaded that it was not going to be possible to do unless I came over and made it happen. He told me the type of television features made in Bhutan are 100% based on Bollywood style films. Dancing, singing, weddings, angry mother-in-laws, more dancing and so forth. The genre of serious drama looking at 'Real Bhutan' is unexplored.

In addition, the only cameras available were 3-year-old HD cameras. T.D. said he would buy a new camera and that I should tell him what to buy and he would buy it. I told him to buy a Red One and very good zoom lens. Reason being that I was nervous about untrained crew changing lenses in below zero and dusty conditions, and that the DOP's only experience was with zoom lens HD cameras. There is zero 35mm or 16mm experience in Bhutan.

When T.D. phoned and said he had placed the order for a full RED camera kit, including all accessories needed, he also politely reminded me that I would have to come and lend a hand.

Apart from the camera kit, there was no audio kit anywhere in Bhutan. The standard method was to plug a shotgun mike on pole directly into the side of whatever HD camera was in use. This was made more difficult I was told, by the fact that every local director used a crane in almost every shot. So audio quality was an ongoing black hole in production quality.

So I headed off to the first shoot in late December 2010 with a few heavy suitcases containing LED lights, sound mixer, radio mikes, roles of different gels and so forth. None of the crew had any experience with this gear, so we began training as soon as I arrived.



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I'm not worth a DOP's bootlace, so it was a strange site to see us blacking out the production office in Thimphu and me demonstrating how to get 'Rembrant' lighting on a face, adding ND gel to the window, using a French Flag and so forth. Fortunately talented DOP Leki Dorji got each point immediately and was able to do a terrific job with the one redhead and one half-broken fluorescent tube soft light we had in addition to my little LED light kit.

Arriving in Bhutan for day one of the shoot, the first meeting was with a senior Buddhist Lama, who had to be invited to give a blessing - and permission - for the shoot to go ahead. The production office had been set up as a temple, and the Red camera was placed on the altar along with images of Buddhas, water bowls and flowers for it to be blessed, along with all to be involved gathered in the tiny room. The Lama was very pleased that the script included no violence or sex scenes. We got the green light.

After the Lama left, T.D. and Leki told me now we would spend the rest of the day while I showed them how the Red camera worked. It turned out it had arrived in a crate the day before and the team had gotten as far as working out how to put the lens on and charge the battery. Other than that, 'Mr Greg' was going to show them everything. I read the manual on the plane and had spent 5 minutes at Lemac pushing a few buttons the week before. It was not a good start, but we moved on.

So while Leki and I together figured out how to work the camera, the sound crew played with the radio mikes, mixer and other bits for the first time in their lives.

5am next morning we jumped on a noisy old mini bus for the full day trip to a remote village we could get to by road. It had certain advantages over other villages I was told, such as power.

Day one of the shoot, I asked where the tape measure was. No-one had ever used one and for a short time they thought I was crazy as I made them go find one somewhere and measure every distance from lens to eye.

No-one had used focus pulling before yet as with the other new techniques it was mastered within minutes, not easy when we used tracks in almost every scene.

PERMISSIONS TO SHOOT AND THE BHUTANESE CENSORS

One indication of the newly-democratic Kingdom of Bhutan, is the need for films to stay within strict guidelines and be approved by government censors. What is 'Bhutanese' and what is not is strictly monitored in many aspects of modern life. We have received approval at all stages of the project. The fact that we had a senior Lama's blessing and astrologer's predictions made this easier than it otherwise would have been I have been told.

Another challenge (T.D.'s, not mine), was to obtain 'Permission to Film' in every place we shot. From government departmental permission to film in the ancient fortress, through senior lamas permission to film in the temples and nunnery, to the village chief's permission to film in whatever village we were in, it was a never ending process.

During shoot-two, I was surprised when an actress could not say if she would be available to be on set the following day until she obtained permission from her husband. In the first shoot she was unmarried and permission had to be obtained from her father. Now for the second shoot, she was married, so permission was from her husband. Every permission required a gift. So many gifts were given; some that I know of, many that I do not.



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