



# Jago - A Life Underwater

wins Jackson Hole's Grand Teton Award

Alison Chapman reports...

In odd-numbered years, international delegates gather in the shadow of the Teton Mountains in Wyoming, USA for the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival (JHWFF). This biennial event attracts the world's leading wildlife, conservation, scientific and environmental film-makers, organisations and broadcasters, as well as equipment and service suppliers. GTC sponsors attending JHWFF in 2015 included ARRI, RED, Sony, Panasonic, Canon and Fujinon.

## Grant Grand Teton Award winner

The 2015 Award winners were unveiled on 1 October at the Grand Teton Awards Gala, which concluded the five-day industry conference and festival. The winner of the top prize, the Grand Teton Award, was the UK-made *Jago: A Life Underwater*, produced and directed by James Reed, with photography by James Morgan, Mark Sharman (underwater) and Benjamin Sadd (aerial).

*Jago: A Life Underwater* is the story of Rohani, a Bajau spear fisherman who, at 80 years old, hobbles around on land and yet can still dive like a fish for minutes on end on a single breath, descending to great depths to stalk his prey like an underwater predator. Seated in his ramshackle stilted hut on the Sulawesi Sea off the coast of Indonesia, this

Yoda-like old man tells his remarkable story. Filming took place over a three-week period in October/November 2014 on RED Epic Dragon cameras at 5.5K for a 4K master. This footage was supplemented with aerial shots from a drone and from a specially built underwater time-slice rig, both using GoPros.

The narrative is conveyed through a mix of the interview with Rohani, in which he describes his life as a child, how he learnt his trade as a young man, eventually becoming a master, plus a moving account of losing his son and how he has come to terms with his own mortality. Key moments are beautifully reconstructed in 4K images.

## Capturing the images

Director/producer James Reed explains how the images were captured and

achieved in line with his objectives: "Visually, the Togean islands in Sulawesi, both above and below the surface, are spectacular but one of the main challenges was going to be keeping some consistency in style as we shifted between the two worlds. That's where James Morgan's use of the Ronin and Benjamin Sadd's aerials fitted perfectly. It allowed the topside material to merge seamlessly with the weightlessness of Mark Sharman's underwater footage, and really helped with the flow of the story.

"Many things were carefully planned and choreographed before we left the UK but there were many unpredictable moments that wholly relied on the instinct of the camera team. As the film was funded independently (on credit cards and people working for free), we could only afford 19 days on location. We had three camera channels running (topside, underwater and drone) so everyone had to work independently a lot of the time. It was an amazing set of rushes to work from, which was lucky as the editor (Sam Rogers) and I only had four weeks to cut it.

"The quality of the images captured RAW on the RED really came into their own in the grade with Blair Wallace. The RAW material was great but Blair took it to another level and gave the extremely long shots (there are only 350 shots in the entire film) a new dimension so they developed, drew you in and could be enjoyed for longer."

James Morgan, the co-director/cameraman adds: "Having spent years photographing the Bajau and other nomadic marine communities around South East Asia, *Jago* was a great opportunity to expand that narrative into a film, whilst trying to keep the same aesthetic. Shooting RAW was a big part of that, enabling us to really dial in the look in post and bring cinematic production values to a remote

location using a fairly skeleton crew." Mark Sharman, the underwater cameraman, adds: "We were blessed with very clear visibility in the waters where *Jago* was filmed. This, coupled with mostly sunny days and shallow depths allowed me to utilise the natural light on offer underwater, and I really went to town on framing the characters with the shards of light created. It worked with the narrative to use only natural light. Filming at 60 and 90 frames per second also helped achieve this, using the RED Dragon's 6K sensor at 1.85:1 and dynamic range on offer, it was definitely the right tool for the job in this case to help with the cinematic look and magical feel to help give an elevated sense of reality. Of course, nothing could have been achieved visually if it wasn't for the natural performances of our characters. They took our ideas and ran with them, and added so much character and flair we could never have planned for."

## Post-production

The grade was done at Evolutions Bristol by colourist Blair Wallace: "My early encounters with the material that make up this great film were potentially a cause for concern. The RED Dragon R3D files first conformed on our Filmlight Baselight system displayed noise patterns, especially apparent in the red channel. Aware that the direction for the look would be to accentuate many secondary colours surrounded by gradients of blue found beneath the surface left me managing my ambitions creatively.

"Initially the film was graded without a texture management pass as it required a fast turnaround for the Jackson Hole festival. This was an HD grade and I used traditional techniques to soften noise – grain reduction, shapes with blurs etc. I felt I was struggling to take the images to the place I felt they needed to be. On revisiting the film in 4K, the image sequence via SunDog Media Toolkit was



processed with Truelmage, an image enhancement process from Real D. The results were remarkable. When examined the coarse red noise had almost disappeared and unlike traditional noise reduction techniques it hadn't softened and smeared or created artefacts. The texture had also been improved with sharpening, intelligently working with motion across the frame, giving an almost 3D effect. Texture analysis and processing gave me a cleaner, sharper source image to explore my creative decisions on a breathtaking collection of shots. A project I will never forget!

## Overall winner

The 2015 JHWFF drew an unprecedented number of entries – over 1000 – from which the lovingly made and self-funded *Jago* was selected as the main winner. Sally Vaughn, an independent media consultant, was moderator for the judges and gave this citation: "This year's Grand Teton Award winner is a quintessential 'filmmaker's film'. Its compelling singular vision is borne out of a passionate collaboration of artists using all the tools in their box to achieve mesmerising results. Stunning cinematography, poetic editing, and a haunting score bring a gentle vibrance to Rohani, an

80-year-old Bajau spear fisherman whose poignant recollections reflect a lifetime tied to the sea."

A UK premier was held at the Watershed Cinema in Bristol making use of their theatre featuring 4K Christie projection. Further UK screenings are being planned.

**JAGO**  
A LIFE UNDERWATER

Produced and Directed by **James Reed**  
Director/Cameraman **James Morgan**  
Underwater Cameraman **Mark Sharman**  
Aerial and Additional Photography  
**Benjamin Sadd**  
Location DIT **Stephen Hedley**  
Editor **Sam Rogers**

AN UNDERDOG FILMS PRODUCTION



Rohani, a Bajau spear fisherman who, at 80 years old, hobbles around on land and yet can still dive like a fish...

