



Mollie Pritchett/Collegian

The view from behind the fourth wall as Per Argentine (senior-film/video) and David Cui (senior-film/video) work on a scene.

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Per Argentine  
senior-film/video



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Cui directs his crewmembers for a scene in Argentine’s senior film, *Sleep*. Argentine wrote and is currently directing the film, while Cui is the film’s director of photography.

# FRAME OF MIND

## Seniors begin shooting final film projects

This is the first in a four-part series tracking the creative process as Penn State’s film/video students shoot, cut and complete their senior films.

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Takes are spoiled by bursts of laughter. The dolly track is visible in the background of a shot. The fire alarm goes off. All typical troubles on the set of a budding student film — well, maybe not the fire hazards.

“Let’s not worry about it,” was the usual response from the movie’s writer/director Per Argentine (senior-film/video). Argentine seemed unfazed as he knelt by the monitor, behind the sprawling pile-up of the cast’s wardrobe scattered across three couches.

The troubles, no matter how unusual, rarely seemed to faze Argentine during the first major day of filming on his senior project, currently operating under the working title *Sleep*.

For many film/video majors, the senior film project is the summation of two years of study and considered a final thesis within the program.

Inside a house on the corner of Nittany Avenue and Burrows Street, the Saturday shoot was the first leg of production in a multifaceted filmmaking process that will continue with rigorous editing of the footage and culminate in a short film. If admitted into the 2008 Penn State Student Film Festival in late April, *Sleep* will be shown alongside

several other remarkable student films.

The film’s main character, Jeff, is an aspiring writer who suffers from “writer’s block, a menacing nightmare and self-imposed insomnia,” Argentine said. In one of the opening scenes being filmed, Jeff criticizes his own “story without an ending” before lighting his manuscript on fire at the kitchen table.

Jeff is played by Jesse Cramer (sophomore-English), who also holds a major role in *Starface*, a senior film being directed by student Chris Sterbank. Having acquired the role after a casting call in October, Cramer said filming with Argentine has been going smoothly.

“Per has a specific idea of what he wants, but he is also open to suggestions,” Cramer said. “He gives me room to try things. He’s really cool about letting me figure it out on my own.”

Argentine’s nonchalant attitude was often counteracted by his fastidious director of photography (among other titles), David Cui (senior-film/video).

In the scene Argentine was filming, Jeff wakes from his nightmare and enters the kitchen, where his roommate hands him a pair of rejection letters from publishers who have reviewed his manuscript. During one take, a rogue pizza box slowly slid into the frame, frustrating Cui, who asked the director, “Should we leave that accident in?”

“I didn’t notice,” Argentine replied before advising they not worry about it.

As shooting progressed, Cui and Argentine also disagreed on the quality of a close-up take.

“Cut. That was perfect,” Argentine said, to which Cui replied “No, it wasn’t. That was the worst one of them all.”

This bickering marked not animosity, but friendly fire. The cast and crew was constantly joking, and aborted takes were met with chuckling, not hostility. Ryan Unger, a 2007 alumnus, noted the stylistic differences between the two.

“David is really into his style,” Unger said. “He’s really passionate about what he does, whereas Per is much more laid-back. [David] knows what he wants, and it’s hard to get him to change his mind, but it’s also a lot of fun to watch.”

Cramer said that it’s worthwhile for the cast and crew “when they get into arguments.”

“It’s healthy to have more than one person in charge,” Cramer said. “They check each other and make sure it works well.”

The movie is part of Argentine’s senior film project for Communications 449 (Advanced Film and Video Projects). The yearlong project began in the fall, when Argentine said students selected his script, along with about a dozen others, to be filmed.

Not every film/video major necessarily writes or directs a film, though everyone must have a role, and some are working on multiple films. For example, despite having graduated, Unger is working as a grip and gaffer on four.

Argentine said it was important that the main character, Jeff, is a writer.

“If you write, you always come into that moment where you’re not sure where to go with a story

or a script,” Argentine said.

Jeff’s nightmare was also vital to the original script idea, stemming from Argentine’s interest in a condition called sleep paralysis, in which a person is unable to move right before falling asleep or upon waking up.

“I guess I always thought it was kind of a cool — not cool, but interesting, kind of freaky thing to happen,” Argentine said. “I guess you could say that maybe I find night kind of creepy.”

A crewmember, Unger, had actually experienced sleep paralysis, but Argentine said he did not discover this until after writing the script.

The condition is often accompanied by dreamlike hallucinations.

“What got me interested was when I heard that some people see demons or shadows or a menacing figure in their room,” Argentine said. Argentine added that Unger had told him he saw a face and felt pressure on his chest.

Because it was difficult to portray paralysis on film, Jeff’s condition was not directly specified in script revisions. Jeff does have a nightmare, however, which remains an important element of the script.

Argentine said the nightmare progresses throughout the film. In a later scene, Jeff will see a Henry Fuseli painting called “The Nightmare,” which will remind him of his dream and bring up the feeling of dread it evokes.

Filming this scene is the next step in the process and will occur at Webster’s Bookstore Cafe, 128 S. Allen St., for two nights after closing time. These shoots will be covered in the next installment of this series.



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Argentine and Cui discuss how best to shoot a scene, while Jesse Cramer (junior-English), the film’s protagonist, rests his head.



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Argentine and Cui analyze a take during the shooting of *Sleep*.