

EASYACTION FILMS

PRESENTS

III SUSPENSION

A man loses his family in an accident but gains
an extraordinary power: **THE POWER TO STOP TIME.**

A FILM BY ETHAN SHAFTEL AND ALEC JOLER

STARRING

SCOTT CORDES ANNIE TEDESCO

PRESS NOTES

DOWNLOADABLE PRESS KIT AND HIGH-RES JPEGs AVAILABLE AT:

WWW.SUSPENSION-MOVIE.COM

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SUSPENSION



PRESS QUOTES

"Finely made science-fiction / tragic-monster story...the most imaginative use of 3-D stop-time since *The Matrix*."

- SAN JOSE METRO (Richard vo Busack)

"Almost-too-painful portrayals of loss and longing by Scott Cordes and Annie Tedesco in the leading roles . . . It is a riveting experience. And you will not believe the sophistication of the special effects that allow the moviemakers to freeze reality."

- THE KANSAS CITY STAR (Robert Butler)

"Heartbreaking, terrifying, and utterly mesmerizing, *Suspension* is independent filmmaking at its jaw-dropping finest."

- eFILM CRITIC.COM (David Cornelius)

"A really intelligent and edgy movie that is equal parts terrifying and heartbreaking . . . Hollywood's been searching for the next Steven Spielberg and George Lucas for some time; I think they've been found."

- FOX 4 NEWS (Shawn Edwards)

"*Suspension* might just be the next *Primer*, an indie sci-fi movie that digs as deep into the characters as the science ... great performances, incredible special effects and brilliant sound design that will make you believe time has truly been stopped."

- MAKING THE MOVIE.COM (John Ott)

"The combination of power and obsession leads to a thrilling and horrifying series of events . . . Both actors give riveting performances . . . The screenplay by Aris Blevins is tight and suspenseful, and the score adds to the excitement. ★★★★★ Stars."

- ANE VIBE.COM (Deborah Buckner)

"Well-acted, artistically shot . . . It's as if the directors have set up an elaborate dollhouse. Shaftel and Joler have created their own world, and want to make sure the audience is as much a part of it as their characters are. . . more gratifying than any of the rock 'em, sock 'em blockbusters that get dumped on us this time of year."

- KJHK 90.7 (Abby Olcese)

SUSPENSION

SYNOPSIS

Daniel, a man nearing retirement, loses his wife and college-age son in a car accident. Slowly recovering from his injuries, alone in an empty house, Daniel begins to rebuild his son's old video camera that was damaged in the crash. Infused with power from the moment of the crash as well as Daniel's overwhelming grief and desire to regain control, the camera develops the ability to stop time when Daniel presses the pause button.

This discovery restores Daniel's sense of purpose, and he fills the vacuum in his life by taking responsibility for another victim, Sarah, a young schoolteacher who lost her husband in the same car accident. At first Daniel just watches Sarah, and takes part in her life vicariously. Then he begins to improve her life in small ways, doing things only he can do with his incredible power. What he doesn't know is that Sarah, connected to the power through the crash, is somehow conscious during the long periods of stop-time. Deep in her psyche, accessed by visions and nightmares, she can REMEMBER what has happened in those long frozen moments.

Daniel makes mistakes, grossly underestimates the havoc he can cause by stopping time. Using his power becomes an addiction, and the vastness of Daniel's power and the deep loneliness brought about by absolute isolation can do only one thing...corrupt him.

Filmed entirely in Kansas and Missouri, this taut thriller/fantasy is about the corruptive nature of power and the dangers of an obsession with control.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

- Kansas boys come home to film old haunts.

Co-Directors Ethan Shaftel and Alec Joler grew up in Lawrence, KS, where much of *SUSPENSION* was filmed. They met in the actual Junior High where the character Sarah is a teacher. When Daniel peeks into the girls locker room during a scene where he is searching the school for Sarah, he is living out a long-time fantasy of the adolescent directors. Other locations had significance in their lives: the Natural History Museum was a favorite spot, and Daniel's house was where director Shaftel was frequently baby-sat as a child. It was as a student in Kansas that Shaftel wrote the short stories that formed the genesis of the *SUSPENSION* screenplay.

- Father-Son in the movie; Father-Son in real life.

Actor Scott Cordes played opposite his real-life son, Sam. Sam's character is killed early in the film, and only seen in home-video flashbacks. Cordes and director Ethan Shaftel drew on real life experiences between Sam and Scott to inform those charged scenes. In some scenes where Scott's character views Sam in home videos he has never watched before, Scott is actually viewing that footage for the very first time in the scene.

- Visual Effects shots comprise 1/3 of total running time.

The quantity of visual effects in *SUSPENSION* is unheard of for most films, much less an independent one. VFX shots account for 1/3 the running time. Faced with a tiny VFX budget, the directors had to develop the most elegant techniques used to create the effect of "stop time." For instance, they used poles and fishing wire that are later removed from each frame, or the simple use of split-screen to stop action in parts of the frame. The two directors started their experiments with fishing line special effects as teenagers, and "prototype" effects that later appear in *SUSPENSION* can be seen in their zero-budget old action movies.

- Harold and the Purple Crayon serves as inspiration.

The popular children's book *Harold and the Purple Crayon* served as an inspiration for the colors and composition of many scenes in the film, as well as the overall themes. The classic picture book about a boy who creates a whole world under his control was the subject of director Shaftel's college entrance essay to the USC Cinema School, and inspired the story of the film and its themes of absolute control and loneliness. Shots of Daniel walking in a frozen world, heavily hued with purple, and with a crescent moon visible in the upper left hand of the frame, are direct references to Harold. As Daniel's control over the world grows, the color purple becomes more and more present.

- Greek Legends of Pygmalion guides production.

Another influence on *SUSPENSION* are the legends of Pygmalion, about a man who falls in love with a statue he creates, as well as an older legend of a greek sailor who kills himself after defiling a nude sculpture of the goddess Aphrodite. When Daniel spies Sarah frozen in the shower, her body position and placement is a reference to that real-life sculpture of the goddess getting out of her bath.

- LA Musician scores his first film.

Jed Whedon, brother of writer/director Joss Whedon, created one of the characters in the film: the music. So much of the film follows Daniel alone in a frozen world, that the music becomes the externalization of his emotions, an element that reacts to and plays off of him like another character in the room. Whedon's band the Southland has been a fixture in the LA music scene for years, but this is the first feature film he has scored.

- LA Actress returns to childhood home to shoot movie.

Lead Annie Tedesco, who grew up in Lawrence but now lives and acts in Los Angeles, agreed to come back for the 29 day shoot and live in her parents house in order to be a part of the film. The rest of the cast already lived in KC. The production crew was one-third local, one-third brought from Los Angeles, and one-third from Minneapolis.

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CAST BIOGRAPHIES



Scott Cordes

Scott dreamed of being a rodeo clown as a boy in Nebraska, and tried his hand driving an alfalfa truck, radio DJing in small towns, and working on rock shows as a stage hand before becoming an actor. He starred in the independent feature *Raising Jeffery Dahmer* as the killer's father in a film based on the real-life memoir written by Lionel Dahmer. Scott also directs theater and has worked with the likes of Don Knotts and Ann Davis in the course of his career. Scott has three children, one of which appears opposite him in *SUSPENSION* as his character's son.



Annie Tedesco

Originally from Lawrence, Kansas, Annie Tedesco has lived in Los Angeles for the past five years. She has trained with *The Groundlings* and is a member of a prominent theatre group that produces original works by local play writes. She has also starred in numerous national commercials including AOL, Dr. Pepper, Burger King and Chase Bank. In addition, she has worked in print campaigns for Weight Watchers, Sprint and Yahoo. Annie has also been a part of a comedy ensemble that had a 3 month run at The Improv as well as made appearances on network shows, and independent films.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



- Ethan Shaftel (Co-Director, Producer)

Ethan made video games and short movies as a teenager in Kansas, and had received filmmaking honors from the American Film Institute before being awarded a scholarship to USC film school. Graduating with honors in 2002, he was hired to direct a series of games for Hasbro. Royalty money from the games was the seed investment for *SUSPENSION*, his first feature.



- Alec Joler (Co-Director, Co-Cinematographer)

Alec is a filmmaker, animator, and painter, whose work has screened at festivals across the country and been exhibited in the Cochrane Gallery in Washington D.C. Alec studied at the CCAC in Oakland, and was part of the Fox Searchlab young directors program.



- Aris Blevins (Writer, Producer)

Aris was raised in Milwaukee and is a graduate of USC film school. *SUSPENSION* is his first produced screenplay, but another feature script *Dark* is currently in development. Aris has produced several short films, one of which won the Sundance Film Festival Online Competition in 2003.



- Kevin Obsatz (Producer, Assistant Director)

Kevin grew up in Minneapolis and worked at a local Public Access station in high school before receiving a full-ride to USC film school. His shorts have screened at festivals and on PBS television and he received an IFP Access Grant in 2001.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



Ethan Shaftel (Director, Producer)
and Alec Joler (Director, Cinematographer)

Who hasn't daydreamed about pausing time? For some people it would be a way to catch up, to get out from under that pile of work and get ahead for once. For others it would be their ticket to the bedrooms and dressing rooms of the opposite sex; allowing us to be tourists in areas of life normally off-limits.

However, what these daydreams miss is that unlike Superman's power to fly or see through walls, stopping time controls not only one's own reality, but everyone else's as well. Stopping time stops not only the cheerleader in the locker room of your fantasies, but also the orbits of the planets, and the neutrons in every atom.

SUSPENSION is about control; its about a man who can control an element of our existence that is so fundamental as to be completely taken for granted. And of course, it's about the kind of corruption that can only follow from truly absolute power.

What you see on the screen today as SUSPENSION started out as two short stories that I had written over ten years ago. Five years later, they were turned into a short screenplay that was never produced. And almost five years after that, I passed the short script on to Aris Blevins along with some other random ideas to see if anything resonated. Well, it did, and six months later, Aris had written a fascinating screenplay that explored the ideas I had been attempting to understand since the beginning, and in ways I hadn't even considered.

Though the power to stop time controls the heavens above and the cells in our bodies, our story takes an intensely human angle: a lonely man with the most modest of intentions, completely lacking the imagination required to use this power on a grand scale. His intention: to comfort and assist a vulnerable young woman during a difficult period in her life. What ultimately addicts him is not the vastness of his power nor the unlimited possibilities, but simply the control he has over one human being: his ability to control both halves of a relationship and thus avoid rejection.

These ideas first took hold of me in the form of *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, the perennial children's favorite by Crockett Johnson about a boy a boy who creates a whole purple universe for himself with his crayon. It was this book that inspired the original short stories I wrote on the subject of controlling time. In fact, Harold was the subject if the college entrance essay that got me into USC Film School. I was struck by two things in particular: Firstly, the fact that the friends Harold draws for himself are always smiling. Why? Because Harold made them smile. The second thing I found more disturbing than my childhood brain could comprehend, is that even though Harold controls his purple universe, he still gets lost in it, indeed to the point of almost drowning in a purple sea he himself created.

-Ethan Shaftel
September 2007

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Interview with Ethan Shaftel (Director, Producer) and Alec Joler (Director, Cinematographer)

How did this project get started?

Ethan: I had written some short stories many years ago about a guy who could stop time, and then had adapted those into a short script that was never made into a movie. When Aris Blevins and I started talking about collaborating on a feature, he took a look at the short script, threw out most of it, took a few of the good ideas and ran with them into a really fascinating screenplay. Alec and I had made shorts together for years, so we both knew we wanted to work together on a feature.

When did you two start making movies together?

Alec: Our first movie together was for seventh grade social studies: Armenia: The Land, The People, The War. Needless to say it was quite bad, but as we continued into dramatic territory, and started winning festivals, our skills and confidence improved.

Ethan: We got into action and thriller territory pretty early on, and started inventing our own special effects techniques. We used a lot of fishing wire and strobe lights. We had a head-in-a-bucket shot in one short movie that did very well at festivals.

Explain some of the visual motifs and imagery that appear in the SUSPENSION.

Ethan: Purple was a big color for us in the movie. I gave the DP and our production designer the children's book Harold and the Purple Crayon early in our production for them to pull from and use as a guide. We decided that Daniel in our movie is like Harold, using his camera instead of a crayon to make a universe around him. So both Ben and Sarah brought purple into the scene at key moments, to represent a world under Daniel's control. As Sarah's world starts to change around her, we see purple in those scenes as well.

Alec: Since the subject matter was so fantastic, we wanted a very subdued style which would not overpower the characters or draw attention to itself, yet would still yield striking images. This was not only for stylistic reasons, but also because we had so many special effects shots, and knew that a more controlled shot style would allow for an overall cohesion to the picture, allowing the effects to blend in. And as far as screen placement and direction was concerned, you'll notice Daniel is almost always facing screen right, and Sarah facing screen left, which reinforced their opposition as characters. We used that screen direction even in scenes where they were alone.

What unique challenges com from making a movie with such a large number of visual effects shots?

Alec: It forced us to be creative in utilizing different techniques in different circumstances for the stop-time stuff. Whether it was getting people to stand still, stringing things up with fishing line, creating frozen sculptures, or knowing the only way was through computer graphics, this project really made us use everything in our tool belts.

What was the casting process like?

Ethan: We had several casting sessions in Kansas City, and had a lot of great actors to choose from, but we did have trouble casting the role of Sarah, the female lead. So we had one more session in Los Angeles and found Annie Tedesco. Originally, we had cast a different actor for the male lead, and Scott Cordes hadn't even read for us at all. We would have never met him and made a different movie except that we had to push back our shoot by a few months, and the original guy couldn't do it. So the casting director sent a tape of Scott Cordes reading and it was so obvious that he had just what we were looking for the whole time. So we cast him from the tape, we never met him in person until the rehearsals.

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SUSPENSION seems unusual in that it switches protagonists mid-way through the movie; how did you pull this off?

Alec: We knew at a certain point, our audience would stop empathizing with Daniel, because of the choices he makes, and the direction he allows himself to take. Therefore, we knew that Sarah had to eventually become the focus, even though the movie is mainly about Daniel's descent. By weaving his story into hers, and having his actions directly effect hers, I felt we could transition into more of a detective story with her trying to figure out what is going on while at the same time never fully leaving Daniel.

Ethan: A really interesting thing that we've found when talking to people after they've seen the movie is that each person will identify a different moment where they feel that Daniel has crossed the line with his power, when he finally does something that they themselves wouldn't do, or think they wouldn't do. The steps are so gradual as Daniel starts to invade her privacy and really take things too far.

There are many partnerships in the film--two writers, two directors, two DPs, two editors--how does that work?

Alec: With partnerships, it comes down to trust. With me and Ethan, the partnership is like a second skin. When we are talking through a scene, each of us has enough respect and confidence in the other that we have no trouble coming up with the way we want to shoot it. Working with Ben Van Cleave was a blessing. Though I am credited as Co-Cinematographer, his lighting schemes and choices brought this movie to a whole new level. If you trust who you are working with, and have confidence that they know what they're doing, it makes your job that much easier.

Ethan: With writing and editing, I think working in partners or teams can often be a good idea. It keeps you honest, and the partner also becomes your audience, you're working on something to impress them or to wow them, and you can't wait to finish the scene or whatever to show them. For directing, you have to have a very special history to make it work. Alec and I have done this together for so long, we have our own language. I think you see directing partnerships in siblings for that reason. But with a first feature, and an independent one on a tight budget, there is just so much demanding your attention as a director, and you feel like you can never really give any decision enough time. So have a second director is so wonderful, when you know that you are really on the same page, because you can get twice as much done.

How is shooting an independent film in Kansas different that shooting in Los Angeles or New York?

Alec: In Kansas, people are much more inclined to help out an independent production simply for the cool factor, meaning people get excited about it and want to help this cool project.

Ethan: And locations are a lot more agreeable. Restaurants, stores, a lot of places will work with you to find a time to shoot without charging a fee. In our department store scenes, we shot during business hours, and they let their employees be the extras. For the car crash in the beginning, we were able to stop traffic and shut down a street, something we couldn't have managed on our budget in LA under any circumstances.

What have you learned from creating Suspension that you will take to future projects?

Alec: I've learned that having professionals around you makes your work not only better, but easier. I've learned that there should always be room for improvising new shots, even if they aren't on the schedule, and that you need to stick to your guns to get them in. I've also learned that making a movie with a lot of special effects is a big pain in the ass, so hopefully our next project will not be about a guy who can stop time.

Ethan: I second that.

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FACT SHEET

Production Company:	easyAction LLC
Running Time:	98 minutes
Date of Completion:	August 2007
Release Format:	HD 1.78 (16x9) / color
Genre:	Thriller / SciFi / Drama
Original Language:	English
Country of Origin:	USA
Shooting Dates:	October 19 – November 15, 2005
Shooting Locations:	Lawrence, KS, Topeka, KS, Kansas City, KS and MO
Post-Production Location:	Los Angeles, CA
Shooting Format:	DVCPRO HD (Panasonic VARICAM camera)
Sound Release Format:	Dolby E
Post Production Facility:	Matchframe - Burbank, CA
Visual Effects:	Black FX - Los Angeles, CA

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CAST LIST

Daniel	Scott Cordes
Sarah	Annie Tedesco
Jane	Caroline Vinciguerra
Josh	Dan Nichols
Leo	David Fritts
Officer Donelban	Mykel Hill
Henry	Sam Cordes
Doctor Heitzer	Walter Coppage
Max	James Wright

CREW LIST

Directed by	Ethan Shaftel and Alec Joler
Produced by	Aris Blevins
Co-Producer	Kevin Obsatz
Line Producer	Dain Ingebretson
Executive Producer	Ethan Shaftel
Written by	Aris Blevins
Story by	Ethan Shaftel
Director of Photography	Ben Van Cleave
Co-Cinematographer	Alec Joler
Music by	Jed Whedon
Edited by	Hillel Aron Meg Decker
Casting Director	Heather Laird
Production Designer	Sarah Kruchowski
Art Director	Nick Foster
Sound Design by	Kevin Roache
Production Sound Mixer	Chris Blunk
Assistant Director	Kevin Obsatz
Assistant Camera	Jeremy Osbern
Gaffer	Amanda Treyz
Grip / Swing	Michael Stoeker
Script Supervisor	Robert Hubbard
Visual Effects	Black FX, Los Angeles
Additional Visual Effects	Ali Donze