



PRESS CUT

GAUNTLET

For More Information

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Kelly Rogers as Pixel



Technical Specifications

Country of Origin:	United States
Year:	2021
Running Time:	126 minutes
Rating:	PG: Violence and computer animated death scenes
Shooting Format:	HD Digital / 1920x1080p / 16x9 / 23.976fps
Available In:	DCP and Blu-Ray
Audio:	5.1 and Stereo
Language:	English

Credits

Cast

Michael
Pixel/Dr. King
Surv/Steve
Rein/Adam
Gabriel
Neyta

Guardian

E.V.E./Lyn Milkovich
Lideri
Voice of Guardian
Voice of Lideri
Courtney
Jim Fox
News Anchor 1
News Anchor 2
News Anchor 3
Field Reporter

Crew

Writer and Director
Producers

Cinematography
Camera Operator

1st Assistant Camera

Boom Operator
Script Supervisor
Make Up Artist
Costume Designer

Editor
Sound Design

Sound Mixer
Crowd Recordist
Composer

DYLAN STRETCHBERY
KELLY ROGERS
JOHNATHON BYRD
JEFF LOEHRKE
AUSTIN MIDDLETON
ANDREW CALLIS
JEFF LOEHRKE
ANDREW CALLIS, JOHNATHON BYRD,
DYLAN STRETCHBERY & JEFF LOEHRKE
CARA LOEHRKE
JEFF LOEHRKE
JOHNATHON BYRD
JEFF LOEHRKE
JESSICA LaPIERRE
JIM SHERWOOD
MIKE GONCALVES
JEN GONCALVES
LAURA WINDHAM
KYLE HANCOCK

JEFF LOEHRKE
CARA LOEHRKE
JEFF LOEHRKE
JEFF LOEHRKE
JOHNATHON BYRD
CARA LOEHRKE
JESSICA LaPIERRE
EMILY KEENE-REYES
JOHNATHON BYRD
EMILY KEENE-REYES
KELLY ROGERS
JEFF LOEHRKE
KELLY ROGERS
JEFF LOEHRKE
SHANE SORENSEN
MARSHALL BALES
JEFF LOEHRKE
MARSHALL BALES
STEPHEN WEST
JORDAN SHABABY
KYLE SMITH



Logline

A stranger to the world of gaming, a meek and mild teen is transported into the digital space of a vintage video game, where he must find a way to rescue his trapped older brothers and return home before the console is unplugged and donated.



Jeff Loehrke as Rein facing off against a group of *Havari* guards

Synopsis

In 1995, Michael discovers an old gaming console and is suddenly imported into a life and death video game. He embarks on a dangerous quest by discovering his two lost older brothers Adam and Gabriel, who've been held captive by the game's champion Neyta.

Through circuits and cheat codes, Michael must find a way to free his brothers and export them home before they all become trapped inside the game forever, without being deleted in the process.



Movie trading card designs reflecting the early 1990's

Film Team



JEFF LOEHRKE - Writer/Director/Editor/VFX Artist/Sound Designer

Born and raised in Northwest Ohio, Jeff is a proud graduate of Bowling Green State University, achieving a Bachelor's Degree in Film Production and Telecommunications. Later, he gained animation principles and 3D modeling techniques through online courses at School of Motion. GAUNTLET is his first feature film and it has been a labor of love. Finishing the final draft of the screenplay back in 2011, Jeff began creating a science fiction, action film inside his garage. Working with "no budget" and shot on a rented Panasonic HVX 200 P2 Camera, the entire cast and crew produced a film that paid tribute to the video games of yesteryear. Only working on his free time, Jeff found a way to shoot, edit, composite the VFX shots, design/animate the FIU systems, model the 3D sets and created the sound design of the film, all with little resources. The 10 year long production is now finally complete.



Jeff Loehrke directing Andrew Callis (Left) and manning the camera during a scene (Right)

SHANE SORENSEN - Assitant Editor/Sound Designer

Graduate of California State University Los Angeles with a BA in Film and TV Production, Shane has worked in post production over a decade ranging from feature films to short documentaries. Working all over the country in Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Denver, his credit on films include STOLEN (2012), EXPENDABLES 2 (2012), ABDUCTED (2013), and NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (2015).

MARSHALL BALES - Sound Mixer

Anderson University (IN) graduate in Audio Engineering, Marshall has been designing and producing live and studio audio experiences for the last ten years. Engineering for plethora of studio albums, surround sound art experiences and live touring, GAUNTLET is Marshall's first feature production.

JORDAN SHABABY - Composer

Hailing from Atlanta, Georgia, Jordan has been sequencing and composing music for over 10 years. Graduate from Liberty University, GAUNTLET is Jordan's second feature in composing music, with his first being JOB'S DAUGHTER (2013).

Cast



DYLAN STRETCHBERY - Michael Rodina

is an actor/improviser based out of Los Angeles. Born and raised in Northwest Ohio, Dylan began performing in high school and later graduated from Bowling Green State University with a focus in theatre and film acting. With full training in the Meisner Technique (The Taylor School of Acting) as well as many years of improvisational experience (UCB, The Second City), Dylan used these skills to create and star in *THE THICK BLUE LINE* (2019), *MY CRAZY EX* (2016-17) and *BEHIND THE BLINDS* (2016).

"Having the opportunity to shoot a feature film, with the majority being filmed in front of a green screen, was such an incredible opportunity. Imagination is your best friend on set – acting in front of a green screen only to later see it morphed into an enormous stadium – at the time, you had to create that in your head. I have come a long way since this film and it was certainly an affirmation to make this my career path." - Dylan Stretchbery

KELLY ROGERS - PIXEL/Dr. King

is a Tallmadge, Ohio native and a proud graduate of Bowling Green State University where she received her BAC in Acting/Directing. Kelly acts in film and occasionally on stage, writes more songs than she can count, and has starred in *CHILL: THE KILLING GAMES* (2013), *DARK OF MOON* (2012) and *LAKESIDE* (2011).



"Every piece I work on no matter how small or grand is a learning experience. But Gauntlet felt like hanging out and filming with family, which was more valuable to me than anything. I also learned that it is VERY hot under the lights in a skin-tight, black, leather bodysuit." - Kelly Rogers



JOHNATHON BYRD - Suriv/Steve

is a renaissance man of comedy and entertainment and has been active in radio, theater, improv, podcasts, film, and standup comedy. He began exploring the world of entertainment back in 2007. After some time away, Johnathon has re-entered the entertainment world and is currently working on many projects, one of which, his podcast "Word Has It", has been released back in December 2021.

"Any time you're playing a video game, no matter what type of game, you ask yourself at one point 'man, how cool would it be to be there?' Now I sort of am there thanks to the CGI set designs and green screen. It's really cool!" - Johnathon Byrd

The Journey

Interview with Writer/Director JEFF LOEHRKE

How did you come up with the concept for the film?

I think the best way to answer this question is by giving a picture of the reality I was facing back in 2011. 2 years removed from graduating college with a Film Degree, I was still struggling to find a job in my field. Frustration finally came to a peak when I couldn't even get a Production Assistant post on a local film crew. Knowing that I was a dime a dozen when it came to videography, I chose the VFX route to make me stand out and hopefully get hired. The catch was I had no work to put on my reel that was VFX nor was I trained in it.

I came up with a short concept of a character standing in a circle with three towers shooting energy balls at him, all the while dodging them to survive. I figured if I shoot it, create the world in 3D and add all the visual effect elements, I should have a decent reel to show to employers. But when I was writing the treatment, that scene took off and morphed into a short film that explored the idea of the character being a real person being trapped inside of an 80's video game console. I found this route to be fascinating because growing up in the 90's, video game consoles is what I grew up playing and I wanted to do a film that reflected that past.



Writer/Director Jeff Loehrke

The short film idea continued to grow as well and I now had a full feature, 90-page screenplay by October 2011. The action sci-fi film paid tribute to all facets to gaming, not just video games. Examples included chess, 1st person shooter, 16-bit arcade fighting, cheat codes and trading cards. My love for gaming in general was fully expressed in the protagonists journey and I now had a behemoth that I really wanted to create visually.

How did you find your talent?

I attended Bowling Green State University in northwest Ohio and in 2009, graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Film Production. What was great about the university is that the Theater and Film Department purposefully had the acting classes pair up with the film production classes for students to both gain experience in their respective fields. Because of this, I was fortunate to have met the future lead roles for the film: Dylan Stretchbery, Kelly Rogers and Johnathon Byrd.

When I finished the script in 2011 and began casting, it was a no-brainer for me to reach out to them. Each said yes not only to be in the film but to travel to Nashville, TN for production was planned to be shot at my house. Living in Tennessee also gave me the opportunity to meet TN natives Andrew Callis and Austin Middleton who said yes in the casting process. Andrew had the physic and physical training to play the main antagonist. Even though he had a mask on with no speaking lines, he was great to give that dominant presence on camera. Austin was still in high school doing theater classes and was phenomenal on camera in being the youngest character.

Finally, I had another actor all lined up to play the eldest brother, Adam. Unfortunately he had to bail before shooting began in the summer of 2012. Frantic and working with no budget, I chose to step in to play the role. I don't regret making this decision, but there were times during production that I feel I would have benefited being behind the camera than in front. Lesson learned.



Dylan Stretchbery as Michael

What gear did you use?

After doing research on which was the best camera to use for green screen filming, the Panasonic HVX 200 P2 Camera was the one I kept seeing. In 2012, it was arguably the best camera for this because of the particular sensor the camera featured and that it shot in 24fps with 48fps as an option. It was also incredibly affordable to rent and you didn't have to worry about changeable lenses as an additional price tag. In addition, it had 2 XLR inputs for us to record audio directly into the camera. Now looking back, this was a mistake due to the poor nature in audio capture that had occurred on some shoot days. The other headache that the HVX200 posed was the file structure the footage came in. In order for me to clearly know what clip was what, I created an entire printed entry log just to be organized. This camera was used for both shoot weeks in 2012 and 2013 respectively.

As luck would have it, right as we began filming was when the DSLR camera boom happened. To rent one of those cameras was just not an option because of the steep price tag, let alone needing to also rent interchangeable lenses. It wasn't until later when the action/fight scenes were filmed on green screen in 2017 is when I chose to rent the Canon DSLR 5D Mark 2 using the Canon EF 85mm prime lens and EF 16-35mm zoom lens. This was great because audio wasn't a priority and having the depth of field was a huge plus in capturing some of the tight shots.

The green screen was a \$150.00 starter pack off of Amazon and I studied like mad to create my own custom built PC for post-production. Doing the custom build turned out to be one of the best decisions I made for this project. Because of the decade long investment, I was able to replace outdated computer hardware when necessary, saving money in the process.

What locations were used in shooting the film?

Production began in 2012 and at that time, my family and I owned a house just outside of Nashville, TN located in the suburbs of Goodlettsville, TN. All the scenes that weren't green screen were shot in our house. Our front door, balcony, kitchen, living room, guest bedroom and basement are all featured in the film. The two car garage was used as a studio to set up and light the green screen to film all of the speaking roles and a couple of action shots.

In 2014, my family moved to Jackson, MS for a work opportunity. At that point in the project, the film needed an additional 1/3 of filming to be completed. Luckily, the only scenes that were needed was only on green screen and not in the "real world". So during the winter in 2017, we once again set up the green screen studio in my garage and finished the rest of filming. This included all of the remaining hand-to-hand combat fight scenes, the bow and arrow fight sequence and the extras dressed in fedoras to create a crowd in a speakeasy. I strategically chose to film in the winter time because we learned that it gets pretty toasty in a garage during the late summer months in the south, especially when you're wearing a full body costume.



Lauren Goldsmith preparing for her news report performance (Left), director Jeff Loehrke setting up a shot (Right)

How were you able to shoot your scenes on green screen?

There was a tremendous amount of pre-planning of not only storyboarding, but also mapping out the layout of the 3D set that had blocking notes and camera placement cues. It was paramount for me to over communicate with the actors in where they were physically located in the imaginary scene because we only had one green backdrop to work with. This meant that camera framing was an even bigger deal!

At the time of shooting, I didn't know how to champion the 3D modeling of the sets yet so I depended on mood boards and sketches to show the actors what the sets would eventually look like. Now looking back, I give a lot of credit to the actors. The trust that they gave me considering they had so little to work with during their performance is just incredible. The payoff in doing all of this prep work came during post production. When I was finally able to composite the actors in the 3D sets, their movement within the space worked out wonderfully.

Another challenge was the hand-to-hand choreographed fight scenes. At the time of our first filming session in 2012-13, we didn't have a concrete game plan as to how the fight scenes will "look". After a couple of years of brainstorming, I ended up deciding to just do the fight scenes myself. I did this by creating movements for each character and then filmed myself performing the fight one at a time. This also worked because every character that fought had a full on costume and you couldn't see any faces. I then aligned the timing of the shots in post to make it look as realistic as possible. That's why in every one versus one fight scene you see in the film, the camera is profiled because that was the only way I could think of accomplishing such a daunting feat by myself.



Jeff Loehrke as Rein (on table) and as Lideri (standing)

What was the process like in doing the Visual Effects?

I relied heavily on Adobe's compositing software called After Effects. I was first introduced to the program back in my college days where a colleague of mine would create these really cool title sequences to his film assignments. I was hooked and wanted to know everything about the program. In those days, there were only a few video tutorials to learn the software. One person I really enjoyed was Andrew Kramer, founder of VideoCopilot.net. I dissected everything I could and catered the new techniques to the film project. Knowing beforehand what I needed and how to frame the actors to get the right shot for the visual effects (VFX) was critical.

Throughout the years of post-production, other great tutorials from Red Giant, Creative Dojo and Film Riot were becoming nationally known on YouTube. Each passing year I became even more comfortable in the compositing process to make the shots look realistic as possible. 3rd party plugins like Trapcode Particular, Form and Optical Flares were huge in creating the sci-fi look that I wanted. Then awesome programs like Magic Bullet Looks and Red Giant Universe arrived in 2014 where I could stylistically create that gritty, out-dated VHS look.

Finally, I was introduced to AEsScripts.com in 2015, a place where people would create these amazing code based commands that you would apply in After Effects to get a desired effect. Not only did these scripts help the speed and workflow of creating the shots, but some were used to create some really artistic shots! In the end, there are over 750 VFX shots in the film. I'd be lying if I said I knew how to tackle each of them before we began filming. It has been a journey of not only creating something from scratch, but also an immense amount of problem solving to make the best shot possible.

What inspiration drove the overall design of the world of Gauntlet?

I was heavily inspired by the art style of the 80's decade and of the film TRON: Legacy. In TRON, the glowing neon blue lights against the dark, sleek reflective surfaces was such a unique look. I wanted to mix that style with the gritty, faded, VHS analog look of the 80's. Yellows, purple's and teal blue's were my main color palette that I drew inspiration from. One challenge I had a lot of fun designing was the 16-bit fake video game I called "City Strikes" that takes place in the middle of the film. I took inspiration from a video game that I loved playing on Super Nintendo growing up and that was Final Fight. Each element in the environment was hand painted in Adobe Photoshop along with each pose of both characters, which came out to be 126 poses collectively.



Gauntlet HUD Design from a first person perspective

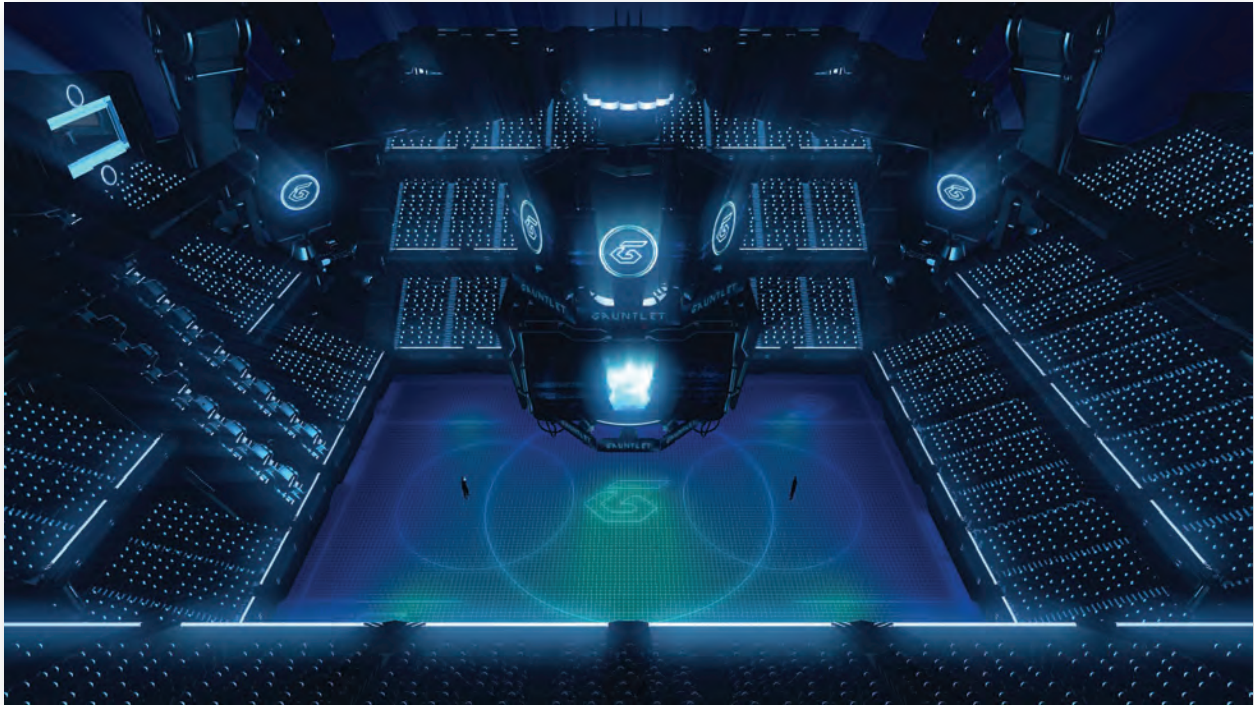


16-Bit video game City Strikes design

The biggest challenge design-wise was figuring out a way to do a retro design in a futuristic way. In the film, Gauntlet is a video game console that was created in 1987. So the mindset I took was thinking from the perspective of the fictitious video game creators who were in charge of designing the future world of Gauntlet in that time. Challenging, yes? So for the Heads Up Displays (HUD) and Fake User Interface graphics (FUI), I chose to keep the overall design simple and used basic primitives to drive the overall theme. Every HUD, FUI and scoreboard design you see in the movie was handcrafted and animated by yours truly. This was another reason why it took so long to finish this film.

What was your process in creating the 3D sets?

There were three main programs I used to create the 3D sets for Gauntlet. In Adobe After Effects, I was able to use Video Copilot's Element 3D plugin to create sets like the Gaming Lobby, the Gauntlet Arena, Pixel's Tower and each of the three challenges. I maximized a pre-built modeling pack from Video Copilot and used the elements collectively to create all of the sets. It was an immense timesaver but also captured the style I had originally envisioned. This was fantastic because not only did these sets take place throughout the film the most, but the work it took to line up the actors on green screen was much easier since it was already inside After Effects, which is a compositing software.



The Gauntlet Arena

For the more complicated sets, Autodesk Maya was used to create a grand speakeasy for one of our antagonists and Maxon's Cinema 4D created the Power Grid set. Both of these 3D modeling softwares have their respective pros and cons but it was really liberating modeling these two sets from scratch. To say that I learned a lot during this process was an understatement. Without Mike Hermes on YouTube and Greyscale Gorilla, I wouldn't have been successful in creating those sets.

Once the sets were created, I used 3D cameras to match the performance of the actors. This is where the pre-planning really paid off because I was able to look at my blocking notes during production to match the correct angle in post. I have to admit, it felt liberating to see a whole scene that we shot on green screen come to life with the 3D set added for the first time.

Why did it take 10 years to complete the film?

The original goal for this project was to create a film reel that could stand me apart from the competition to get hired. That happened sooner than expected, but I was still able to keep production going. After couple of years of progress, the time came to figure out how to create the 3D sets. I hit a massive creative roadblock. All of my early test were extremely lackluster and didn't look decent at all. It was the first time where I thought giving up on the project was the best option. I walked away from the film.

Time away was therapeutic because it was in that down period is when I came up with a potential solution. A video software company called Video Copilot had a plugin for After Effects called Element 3D that I purchased in the past. I didn't realize the capability it had to create some of the sets. This was invigorating and I soon realized that I was quickly back on the saddle. To remind you, I'm still only doing this on my free time. So another few years past and I felt burned out creatively.

This is where I took a step aside to create a YouTube channel that helped educate new sports fans using animated explainer videos. Lurks Lessons was born. The year was late 2018 and I was about two thirds done with the VFX on Gauntlet at that time. When COVID stopped the sporting world in 2020, I finally shifted gears back to the film project, fully committed in finishing it. It's hard to assume how long the project would have taken me if I didn't have other priorities throughout that decade. But I'm glad it did because I am a totally different filmmaker/artist than I was when I first began this film in 2011. That's the thing with progress though right? You learn and grow by doing. However, to say that I went back to touch up some VFX shots with newfound knowledge is an understatement and another reason why the project took more time.



The Gauntlet Arena during the "Vertigo" challenge.

Early Reviews

"It's got easter eggs for fans of retro games, a serviceable story that can hold the film up and (I know I keep saying this, but I have to drive the point home) VFX that would catch the eye of anyone worth their salt in the film industry." - Andrew Bailey, BG FALCON MEDIA

Links

Official Website: www.jelproduction.net/gauntlet
Official Facebook: www.facebook.com/gauntletmovie.jel
IMDb Page: Coming soon





(Left to Right) Cara Loehrke, Johnathon Byrd, Jeff Loehrke, Austin Middleton and Dylan Stretchbery at the premiere.

Director's Statement

"Do you like to play video games?"

This was a common question asked on the playground if you were a kid growing up in the 90's. It was an invitation to measure your social status among the kids at school, to see if you had access to the latest gaming console at your house and go toe to toe in the latest video game. The thing is, I didn't have a gaming console in the 90's. Instead, board games, trading cards, and chess was my means of competition. But that didn't stop me from honing my video game skills at the neighbors' houses during pool parties or holiday barbeques. I wanted to be the best, especially during a decade where the video game craze took off. Thirty years later the games have evolved, but the craze still hasn't died down. This is where the idea for Gauntlet was born.

I chose to write and direct this film because I wanted to create a film that gave appreciation to the human element of competition through the expression of gaming. From the early days of chess to today's virtual reality technology, humans have been engaged in competition through a means of set rules with a desire for victory. Because of the incredible speed of technology in the video game industry, the graphics and game play have exponentially risen in the previous decades. Studies have shown that people can easily immerse themselves in this digital space and some would prefer it to their own reality. Knowing this, I wanted to tap into the experience of being trapped inside of a video game during the decade I grew up in.

Looking into the film, Adam embodies the idea of self-regret in pushing the boundaries of playing the game Gauntlet. His line "I wish I never would have pressed start" is an anthem to any gamer who looks back with empathetic eyes on their younger years, wishing they would've invested that time differently. I was one of those gamers. Like Adam, you can get tunnel vision into playing a video game and not only lose track of time but to lose your better judgment that ultimately leads you in becoming a prisoner of the game itself.

The 90's decade gave us Beta-max and VHS home video and I wanted Gauntlet to feel like it was made back in 1995, the same year the film takes place. I filmed in a lower resolution to get that grainy dated look on the Panasonic HVX 200 P2 Camera. I also wanted the film to be experienced as if you were watching an old, unmarked VHS tape. The VHS filter aesthetic to the film is intentional throughout, along with the blue screen showing the 'Play' and 'Stop' at the bookends of the film.

Aside from its technical aspect, this film will always be special to me because Gauntlet took 10 years to complete. This is because the tremendous amount of work that was involved in creating the 750 plus visual effect shots. Individual 3D set designs, animated heads up displays and hand painted energy batons frame by frame were all created from scratch by yours truly. It was a grind, but I am forever thankful for the cast and crew who have encouraged and supported me to complete the project throughout the years. Today, I consider them family. If it wasn't for them, this film wouldn't have been completed. Finishing this film has given me the confidence and inspiration that anything is possible. Kind of like defeating the video game's champion, only this experience is so much more rewarding.