



>>> Article by Barbara Robertson

COULD A WOMAN HAVE A CHILD ONLY IN HER IMAGINATION? The possibility is about as alien as the opposite notion -- that a young mother could forget her child. In Columbia Pictures' *The Forgotten*, directed by Joseph Ruben, Telly Paretta (Julianne Moore) grieves for a child she's certain died in a plane crash... or is she certain? Was there a son? Her psychiatrist tells her that 8-year-old Sam never existed. And she can find nothing to prove he did.

Fortunately, Telly bumps into a man in the same dilemma. Together, she and Ash Correll (Dominic West) search for the truth. Could they be the victims of an otherworldly government conspiracy, and who is that mysterious man (Linus Roache) who seems to be everywhere? The suspense builds with the help of visual effects supervised by Sony Pictures Imagesworks' Carey Villegas. Effects were produced at Imageworks, The Orphanage and New Deal Studios. The Orphanage created digital doubles; New Deal built miniatures; Imageworks handled the rest, and put it all together. "The director of photography, Anastas N. Michos used a handheld camera a lot and had a stylized treatment that was very realistic," Villegas said. "The effects needed to be seamless."

The first effect is a car crash. The camera looks through a car's side window, past Telly in the passenger seat, as a Suburban crashes into the passenger door -- not so hard that she is injured, but hard enough to turn the glass into a spider web. Moore was filmed in a car with greenscreen outside the windows; the greenscreen was replaced at Imageworks by a liveaction background plate. The glass was cracked digitally.

"The trick to the effect was the way we shot the background plate," said Villegas. The crash was filmed in reverse in a series of plates, starting with the two cars in the end position at the intersection, with the Suburban then backing up. It worked, but only with clever manipulation of the tiled series in post. "We did extensive work in Flame to make it feel realistic. We had to do a lot of speed changes."





The *Forgotten* shifts gears as Telly and Ash desperately search for answers and government agents try to stop them. While hiding out in a small cabin, the two capture an NSA agent (Tim Kang) and tie him to a chair. When Ash threatens the agent, he agrees to talk—but whispers, “They’re listening.” At that moment, the roof of the cabin explodes outward and the agent is sucked up into the sky. “Nothing in the film has hinted that something like this would happen,” said Villegas. “That’s the point of the shot. It’s such a tight shot, you don’t know what happens. One moment he’s there. Three or four frames later, he’s gone.”

The full-size cabin interior was matched by New Deal Studios with a quarter-scale miniature. Moore and West were shot against greenscreen, as was Kang—separately—tied to a chair. “To get the blowing-up effect without using pyrotechnics,” Villegas explained, “we hung the miniature upside down 20 feet in the air on a sound stage, pulled it straight to the ground, and let gravity do the rest.” To give the miniature more heft, they shot it from above at 48 frames a second, and then, as with the car, reversed the result.

The next person sucked off the earth is Detective Ann Pope (Alfre Woodard) who is investigating Telly’s claims that someone took her son. Just as Ann starts to tell Telly she believes her, Ann is sucked out over the ocean. “The shot sounds silly when you talk about it,” admitted Villegas, “but in the context of the movie, it works.”

As cameras rolled, Woodard mimed being pulled backwards. The Orphanage then created and animated a CG character to match, and Imageworks blended the digital double into the plate. Using The Orphanage’s digital doubles composited by Imageworks, the trick would be repeated in later scenes as two more people are sucked off the planet, one during a freefall from a 13-story office building, the other from an airplane hangar during the film’s climax.





For the end sequence, inside the hangar, the 'mysterious man' screams at Telly, and in his rage, shows his true face—a face created at Imageworks using Flame to warp and morph the image. His scream is so powerful it shatters windows. "We couldn't break glass with actors in the building, so it was all done with composites," said Villegas.

Imageworks added CG glass to the first-unit shots and a hazy atmosphere—since the air cannons used to break real glass for later shots in the hangar had filled the air with steam and smoke. The digital effects were created with Houdini and Imageworks' SPLAT renderer. SPLAT's painter's algorithm shortened rendering times for the complex smoky volumes.

Like the cabin, the hangar explodes outward. The shot was accomplished with another New Deal miniature. "The hangar was huge—400 feet long, with a ceiling 30 to 40 feet tall," said Villegas, "so we used a 1/6-scale version—but it was still too large to hang. Fortunately, we had to blow up only a corner." To pull off the roof, the crew took the miniature outside and rigged it with cables and air rams. "These shots, like the cabin shots, start on a character and follow the character up. So we shot it with a Vistavision camera on its side. That gave us more height to create a virtual tilt and pan move later."

With just 98 visual effects shots, *The Forgotten* hardly qualifies as an effects-driven film; however, seamless effects were critical for story points throughout the thriller, and made impossible events possible. "It's an intriguing story," concluded Villegas. "If you buy the ending, you will think the experience was worthwhile."



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