



Jer3miah

Jeff Parkin and Jared Cardon

INTERVIEWED BY DAVEY MORRISON DILLARD

WEB: JER3MIAH.COM

The Book of Jer3miah is a web series created by BYU students in the Winter Semester of 2009. Based on a concept by BYU Media Arts faculty member Jeff Parkin and recent BYU Media Arts graduate Jared Cardon in an effort to produce something through BYU Broadcasting to appeal to a younger demographic, it follows the adventures of Jeremiah, a BYU freshman, as he begins to learn of his unknown heritage and becomes embroiled in a conspiracy that will threaten his life and the lives of those he loves. Described by Parkin and Cardon as a “spiritual thriller,” the series, based on an outline by its two creators, was written by and stars BYU students. Members of a class taught by Parkin and Cardon worked together to shoot and edit each episode every week. Made up of twenty episodes and running about two hours total, the first season concluded over the summer. To date, Jer3miah has had over 80,000 hits in 88 countries.

Season 1 ends with a lot of cliffhangers and a lot of unresolved questions. What’s the plan for future seasons?

JEFF: Jared’s teaching the class. It’s about transmedia, on *Jer3miah*. We’re talking about ways we could further the story with more trans-media elements. We’re looking for funding and

BYU Broadcasting has expressed interest. Right now they’re probably number one, but there’s also somebody else who’s expressed interest, who really likes the show a lot and would actually like to do at least one more season. There’s also talk of a third season. We’re working on outlining the show right now. We’ve been spending a lot of time on that and I think we’ve got the first episode of the season kind of figured out. It’s really awesome. I think it’s gonna be great. It opens with a really cool action sequence—a chase with a horse and a motorcycle.

JARED: Jeremiah spent the whole first season just trying to figure out what the heck was going on. The first season’s kind of his discovery—there’s people trying to kill him and there’s this box. And the second season focuses more on Jeremiah coming to learn what his calling is.

JEFF: There’s the whole idea too of this theme of identity. Jeremiah’s figuring out who he is, who his father is. And we’re all trying to figure out who we are, and what does that mean if we really do believe we’re children of God?

That was actually a moment where I thought, “I’m surprised this is working for me, but it is.”

JEFF: I felt the same thing! There were a number of places like that, when we were writing them,





where we thought, “I don’t know what this is.” But I feel like it worked because it all addresses Jeremiah’s character and so it’s not designed to be preachy or anything else.

It’s designed to be a turning point for him—a moment where he has a little epiphany. And for us that’s also about the way the gospel can do that for us.

JARED: The show’s not a missionary tool; it’s a story. So when those things come as answers for those characters it’s okay, because we want the characters to figure things out. It’s not like, “Hey, audience, this is for you.”

JEFF: So the next season is about Jeremiah trying to figure out what his gifts are. There is, of course, a larger conspiracy now, and that’s cool. Somebody dies.

This is sounding like Harry Potter.

JARED: There’s lots of cool stuff.

JEFF: We’re really, really excited about it. The writing is a really fun part of the process. Actually, everything about this process has been fun. Someone asked us the other night what we would change about the show, and honestly, there are little technical things I’d like to change. But on a larger scale, I wish we could have done more transmedia. But, oh my goodness, the transmedia we *did* do...

JARED: The students developed a lot of extra stuff that doesn’t fit within the box of the show.

JEFF: But I honestly can’t think of much else I would’ve changed about the process. I just think this show is really cool. And I say that not because we really had anything to do with that, but just stepping back and looking at it, I think, “What a weird, cool, funky, moving kind of thing this is.”

JARED: And I feel lucky to have been a part of this. Everything that we needed to make it



happen happened. The last shot of the show—Jeff had talked a long time before we shot it about the kind of shot we needed to end on.

JEFF: A crane, a horse, the valley—

JARED: And we could hardly schedule two hours to shoot in this building on campus—

JEFF: Let alone drive down to Manti. Get all this equipment down there—

JARED: So I get a call when we were halfway through the season from a guy I knew when I was in the animation program and he said, “Hey, I’m watching this show. It’s really cool; I really like it. Is there anything I can do to help?” And this friend works at a really big visual effects house in L.A.—very prominent. And at the time he was the environment lead—he builds these virtual environments, set extensions.

So I said, “Well, actually, there is something.” So that last shot of the show is actually shot in the LDS Motion Picture Studio parking lot. The crane goes up, and we just see a bunch of cars and buildings. But then we hand it off to him and he just makes that shot happen. Again, that was just one of those moments where we were really blessed.

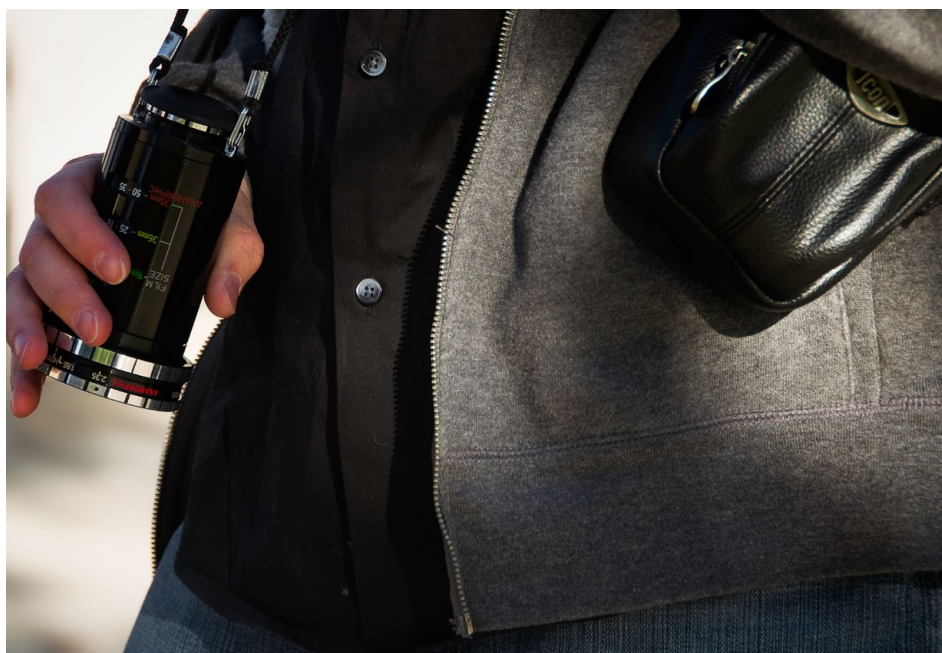
JEFF: We needed these horses.

JARED: We were working with no budget and we needed to have a horse chase.

JEFF: We made a couple of calls and this guy says, “Yeah, I’ll bring up my horse trailer, load up my horses, drive up onto the side of a mountain, and I’ll do it for free.” And the last shot, that whole last scene of the last season, we had the horses for four hours. And we had to shoot that opening crane shot of that episode where the horses were tied up there, then we had to shoot Claire riding on a horse, then we had to shoot Jeremiah and Ammon coming out. So for that last shot we had ten minutes left before the horses had to go. And it was a crane. And I thought, “We are screwed. This is not gonna happen.” And it was a challenging shot because the crane’s moving that way and the horses are coming this way and then the crane comes and moves this way and goes up—it’s a hard move.

JARED: And the horses were cranky—

JEFF: And Jared Shores, who plays Jeremiah, had not really ridden horses before, and so I just



thought, “We’re not gonna get it. The horses are going to have to go away.” So we had take one, two, three, four, five, six. And then on seven—we were now like three minutes before the horses had to leave—and the horses did exactly what we needed them to do. We put the horse out there and he walked and the move got it and the focus worked and everything was there. So there were just a lot of really miraculous things that happened in the making of the show. There was a lot of opposition, and then at the same time there were just all these blessings that would come. When we needed stuff it would just show up there—permission for the music, this space. We were able to decorate two rooms upstairs and they were standing sets for Jeremiah’s room and Brian and Simon’s room.

JARED: It was great; we could go shoot whenever we needed to.

Jer3miah is a really interactive experience—you have the web series, but you also have these other websites with clues, and people trying to solve things, and stuff on Facebook...

JEFF: Taylor Rose, who also did all our motion graphics, sort of handled the ARG [Alternate Reality Game] stuff. And it was great to have somebody we could trust. He knew the show, and he would come and pitch ideas to us. When we first started

we were looking at ways to use Facebook—now all the characters have Facebook pages. Then we started to get people playing the alternate reality game, and at one point we created these packets that went out. We got people's addresses from their Facebook pages and then in the middle of the night we went and slid these things under people's doors.

JARED: So there were people who were playing the ARG who got this packet, but there were also some people where we just randomly stuck it under their doors, too.

JEFF: So what they got was a clue that led to the plaque in front of the Indian statue on campus. And if they put the page right down on top of it, and then they rubbed it, there were letters that came in, and those letters were a clue that helped them figure it out.

JARED: They accessed a website, I think.

JEFF: The crazy thing is that the guy who solved it on the internet lives in Logan, and so he searched for the words [on the sheet of paper].

JARED: He found the picture on Flickr, and then he lined it up, so he didn't even have to be at BYU.

JEFF: And in Episode 4, Jeremiah gets the text on his phone that says, "You have to earn the right to regain the box." On the top of that we put in just a little three-digit code.

JARED: It was WM344, or something like that, which stands for Waymark, which is a way of notating GPS. And so that GPS coordinate then took people to a place where there was a flash drive.

JEFF: And then they got the flash drive and there was a video on it. They uploaded the video to the Davenport Papers.

JARED: Also, on one of those Davenport interviews there was a blip in the audio, and it was actually a message sped up like 300 times and played backwards. So somebody took that blip, slowed it down, played it in reverse, and there was a message in there. I mean, I'm still amazed that people found that stuff.

JEFF: And one of the great things about the ARG is that community kind of formed with people starting to talk to each other, saying, "Hey, did you see this episode? I saw this and it's this many minutes in"—and then they started creating a glossary of different things. But it was all user-generated. So that was a cool piece of it.

JARED: To see a community grow up out of nothing with people who don't even know each

other—this idea of collective intelligence, that someone's bringing this piece of knowledge, and this piece of knowledge, and this piece of knowledge, and together they're able to solve this stuff. That's one of the goals that we had when making the show to help people start to become accustomed to using the internet as that sort of tool.

I just watched the whole show a couple weeks ago and I looked at the Davenport Papers and Zooby News and the Facebook profiles, all after the show had been broadcast. It was interesting following the discovery process in the comments and posts from viewers.

JEFF: We thought, "You know, it'll be really cool someday, when a couple of guys are talking about their college days and they're saying, 'Remember the Davenport papers and the Book of Jeremiah and how we played that? Like, how we solved all those clues?'"

JARED: "And we woke up one morning and there was an envelope under our door?"

JEFF: It's great to create memories that bring you together and help you feel connected, and hopefully get you think a little bit. So those were kind of the transmedia elements.

JARED: That's the thing. Telling a transmedia story is not just me putting online something I would've made for TV. It's much more than that in terms of how the show can impact the audience and then how the audience can impact the show. They'd participate in the game, they could write messages on the Facebook pages of these characters and the characters would respond back to them—so they're interacting with these made-up people. It's very interactive. The audience has a lot of power now in affecting the way those things happen.

The show is very different from a two-hour feature cut up into five-minute segments and put online. There's a real handmade quality to the show that I think really adds a lot to it. It isn't always really polished. It's sort of a hybrid between some of the best of student film and then stuff that looks like what a bunch of college kids might throw together and put online in a week.

JEFF: I think one of the things that makes it interesting is that the people who were working

on the show were doing it because they loved it. I think you can feel that in the show. There's an energy and a passion you can feel coming from the show. For me, one of the reasons it does work is because of the passion that everybody brought.

JARED: You say "handmade," and I think that's cool. In a way it's like when I get a greeting card from somebody that they bought from the grocery store versus one they made for me. There's a special

quality to it that sometimes transcends whatever limitations are in there because there is love in it.

We really had an amazing group of super dedicated students. I think about trying to do some of the stuff they did, while they had classes and they had other things going on and, honestly, there's no way that anyone would've done this kind of stuff—we included—if we didn't feel like we really loved it, like there was a really good reason to do it. ■

