**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Underwater DoP Ian Seabrook Lights *Last Breath* with Astera**

Canadian/British Director of Photography, Ian Seabrook is one of the best when it comes to underwater cinematography. With credits spanning blockbusters *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, *Batman v Superman*, *Jungle Cruise*,andEmmy-Award winning *The Rescue*, Seabrook is at the forefront of his field. For both underwater and surface-based narrative work he relies on Astera, for safe, instantly controllable results. On the 2025 Focus Features film *Last Breath*, he chose Astera to help navigate unexpected challenges below the surface.

*Last Breath* is a narrative feature length adaptation of a 2019 documentary by the same name.“When I saw the documentary, there were sequences that held such tension, I was transfixed,” describes Seabrook. “I said to Alex Parkinson (director of the *Last Breath* documentary and feature adaptation) that for this narrative version, we must endeavor to achieve the same.” Shooting in Malta and Scotland, this international, predominantly underwater production was Parkinson’s first narrative feature. Starring Woody Harrelson, Simu Liu and Finn Cole, the nail-biter true-story follows a team of seasoned deep-sea divers as they battle the elements and impossible odds to save a crew mate trapped 300ft/100m below.

A veteran of three decades of filmmaking, Seabrook knows that countering the unexpected is always part of his job. The underwater portion of production was slated to shoot at Malta Studios, home to the largest exterior tank in Europe–the Deep Tank. With a 35ft diameter and depth down to 36ft, the Deep Tank would be home to the film’s three submerged sets, the most important of which being the diving manifold where Chris Lemons (Finn Cole) becomes trapped. In order to capture the right look and honor the story’s tense drama, they had to first get the lighting just right.

***Testing the Waters***

The Malta Studios tanks draw water directly from the Mediterranean Sea. Sometimes even tiny jellyfish can make their way in along with the water, creating a lively, controlled ocean-environment, that occasionally borders on murky.

Clarity is a major a consideration underwater and any dive tank is apt to get cloudy after a crew of 15 people have spent the day working. Upon arriving in Malta, Seabrook determined that the particulate matter was too dense for the planned scenes. “What happens to the light when natural particulate is illuminated? It blooms", he explains, “The initial clarity and visibility were too low. I made the decision to clean the tank. We brought a clarifying system in from the United Kingdom and introduced a chlorine routine.

 “Following the notion that we would attack the clarity of the water, we decided not to use diffusion or soft boxes on the lights, because I was proposing to shoot at a 4-stop and needed the exposure,” Seabrook elaborates.

***Lighting for the Depths***

*Last Breath* takes place 300ft/100m below sea level, during a violent storm. “These divers are so deep that there would be no light source from the surface at all.” Water absorbs and scatters light to such a degree that at 300ft it’s practically pitch black. “This presented a problem–the tank in Malta does not have a cover or a retractable roof. Daylight was unavoidable.” The crew considered using lifts to cover the tank but ruled it out because high winds in the Malta summer would quickly bring down any above-ground solution. Instead, ever practically-minded Seabrook and crew pivoted to shooting at night.

There was just one significant obstacle–the cast and crew still needed some light to work by. “Working with gaffer, Aaron Keating, a concept was devised to submerge the overhead light. We decided to rig dozens of Titan Tubes on pipe rigs.”

Comprised of 8 pixels which can be individually colored, flashed and programmed from the Astera App, the baton-shaped Titan Tube is a highly controllable and versatile LED lighting solution. Each 40.7" x 1.7"/1035mm x 43mmTitan Tube was housed in waterproof, pressure resistant (down to 100ft) casings from the UK-based Underwater Lighting Company. The low-heat generating Titan Tubes do not require cooling gel, fans, or dry ice to keep them functioning for hours. This proved an important bonus for underwater work, where replacing a light can severely cut into an allotted maximum of six one-hour dives per night. With the improvised lighting grid, Seabrook introduced an ambient source that could be adjusted fixture by fixture, creating enough visibility without losing the sense of ocean expanse.

Given that an RF signal would not reach the filming depth, by default all light fixtures needed to be cabled to ensure dependable illumination. Thanks to Astera's native programming, Lighting Programmer/Board Operator Adam Baker could easily adjust intensity from the surface. “Once submerged and the fixtures were wired in, I would aim the camera at the lighting truss then point with my hand, to adjust either up or down. He was always watching the monitors at the surface so as to know right away what I wanted. Having the multitude of Astera fixtures and never encountering any problems with them during the shoot was alleviating.”

***The Diving Manifold***

The major submerged set piece in *Last Breath* is an underwater subsea station–the diving manifold–where the divers work and where the incident the film is based on, takes place. These structures are scattered throughout the world’s ocean floors and provide a station for commercial divers to perform working tasks. For the film, the set was comprised of an 11m x 6.5m overhead structure, complete with a complex array of densely rigged pipes, gauges and tanks.

In *Last Breath*, the divers, played by Simu Liu and Finn Cole, exit the safety of the diving bell, and descend to the darkness of the sea floor to begin their work assignment, illuminated only by their diving helmet lights and light coming from an underwater ROV, which tracks the diver’s whereabouts. As they make their way to the manifold, a supply cable is deployed from the vessel on the surface, which once connected provides power and illumination to the workstation, that in real world conditions are lit similarly to construction sites, with overly bright work lights. “In designing the lighting for the sequence, I wanted this to mimic the effect of an electrical storm, akin to the awakening of Frankenstein’s monster or some cold, dormant beast. In conjunction with Lighting Programmer Adam Baker, I designed a pattern for the various Titan Tubes rigged to the set so that the structure’s boot up would be simultaneously visually compelling and realistic.”

Exercising creative license (real subsea structures prioritize function over artistry and are often blasted with light), the crew rigged the Titan Tubes to look like work lights nestled into the set’s architecture.

***Leading with Lighting***

While Titan Tubes proved integral for lighting *Last Breath*, Astera’s smaller 21.7" x 1.7"/550mm x 43mm Helios Tubes also played an important role. During one tense scene, a flare is set off underwater. “We used a bank of Helios Tubes clumped together and turned them on to ‘flicker’ mode to augment the light of the flare. Their ability to remotely change the color temperature and intensity plus the intermittent mode, created a believable flame flicker for the gag.” Baker programmed each Helios Tube with a unique flicker that changes intensity as the flare dies, adding to the verisimilitude of the effect. The moment the red illumination snuffs out in the depths, makes for a heart-stopping image.

The compact tubes proved handy in other ways. “The Helios Tubes are portable enough to be mobile,” he explains, “allowing a competent underwater gaffer or electrician to swim alongside the camera while rolling, augmenting for fill light.” This allowed Seabrook to deftly lead or follow talent as they traversed the depths.

“I tend to use Astera on every shoot,” says Seabrook. “They are just so versatile and user friendly.” Underwater cinematography is an especially challenging art and even the most skilled diver/cinematographer has to be constantly juggling creative intent with the harsh environment and the safety of the cast and crew. For Seabrook, Astera offers one less thing to worry about.

*Last Breath* from Focus Features is now showing internationally in theaters.

For more information about lighting from Astera: [astera-led.com](https://astera-led.com/)