



## Netflix's *'Tribes of Europa'* shows a dark future in rich Dolby Vision

Debuting in 2021, Netflix's epic *Tribes of Europa* is a futuristic saga set in Europe 2074. Christian Rein, director of photography for the Wiedemann & Berg project, and his long-term collaborator, colourist Stephan Kuch of post house Panoptimo, were given the task of bringing the design language of that future world to life on the screen.



*"With Dolby Vision, you're making content that's futureproof. It just looks so good on all the new ways of watching it, from big HDR TVs to iPads. So if you want maximum reach and impact, this is the way to go."*

Stephan Kuch, colourist





*"If it looked OK on SDR, I knew that HDR with all its extra headroom would take care of itself."*

Christian Rein, director of photography

### **How did the decision to use Dolby Vision HDR come about? Why were you keen?**

Christian Rein (CR): Back in 2016, I was involved on one of the early Netflix shows to use Dolby Vision, *Girlboss*. In those early days, the temptation was to turn HDR up to the maximum, super-poppy, so garish and bright that it was frankly hard to watch. Four years on, both I and the format have matured, so I was very keen to do this project in HDR. It's as big a change in the end product as Blu-ray was from VHS. And it was easy, because Netflix wanted that too.

Stephan Kuch (SK): There's so much more range and volume with HDR. With Dolby Vision, you're making content that's futureproof. It just looks so good on all the new ways of watching it, from big HDR TVs to iPads. So if you want maximum reach and impact, this is the way to go.

### **Classical influences, today's technology**

#### **How did you settle on a visual style for the series? How did Dolby Vision HDR help you achieve that?**

CR: I'd never worked with the director Philip Koch before. I was given the script and immediately thought of *The Revenant*. I mentioned this to the director and hit the bullseye. He'd been thinking exactly the same thing. So I watched that film 20 times, alongside others like *Children of Men* and *Blade Runner*. The latter was another film we really wanted to emulate. HDR gave us the confidence that we could get that movie's contrasts and clarity, as well as the depths of the murkiness.

One of the primary ideas we took from *The Revenant* was the consistent wide-angle view. I shot mostly on an ARRI Alexa 65 with the big 65mm sensor size, one of the biggest you can get. We tried 25 different lenses and lens sets but everyone fell in love with the old ARRI Prime 28mm, which was used on 80% of the show. It wasn't so much a single camera show - it was a single lens show.



*“At some point in the development of Dolby Vision, magic happened and now the SDR rendered from the HDR looks better than if you’d mastered it in SDR. The atmosphere carries over in a way you could hardly have built up from scratch in native SDR.”*

Christian Rein, director of photography

We used SDR monitors on set. HDR monitoring isn’t really practical yet because of costs and lack of standardisation, both of which will be better in the future. But that’s OK. Stephan had an HDR monitor in the trailer for checking and I lit the set exactly as I would for film. I rated the camera for 400 ASA, over-exposed a stop, used my old light meter, and printed a stop down. If it looked OK on SDR, I knew that HDR with all its extra headroom would take care of itself. We tested the whole pipeline, so I was confident it would work. It did.

#### **How well did the pipeline work for the dailies? Were there any surprises?**

SK: For the dailies, I had an LG HDR monitor alongside my Sony SDR in the truck, just in case there were questions or something to check out. But we tried to avoid watching in HDR too much, because the dailies were in SDR and the editorial decisions were made in SDR. As for surprises, we knew there were some things to watch out for. If you light through windows in HDR, you can sometimes see the light itself. But you know to look for it and you can just blur it out. We knew it was coming, we knew our tools, and there were only around 30 shots in the whole series where we had to do anything like that.

#### **How easy is the workflow and creating the deliverable?**

CR: One of the other things that’s improved so much over the past four years is the SDR creation. At some point in the development of Dolby Vision, magic happened and now the SDR rendered from the HDR looks better than if you’d mastered it in SDR. The atmosphere carries over in a way you could hardly have built up from scratch in native SDR.

SK: The Dolby Vision SDR analysis is very good now and the whole workflow is much improved in Dolby Vision. You can have a good idea and you can really concentrate on the HDR. You don’t have to think all the time about what you might have to do with SDR, whether it’ll work out. The analyser really understands how to convert the gamut. You can tweak it, of course, but the idea you have when grading on HDR translates well to SDR. We only need to render the HDR master and the metadata allows all other versions to be derived. There’s no need to create an SDR master. We just deliver our Dolby Vision master with the metadata to Netflix, and they use these assets to create both HDR and SDR streams for their viewers, and they all look great.

*"We only need to render the HDR master and the metadata allows all other versions to be derived. There's no need to create an SDR master."*

Stephan Kuch, colourist





*“Dolby Vision HDR really help tell the emotional story of the actor. It can amplify their performance without being intrusive.”*

Christian Rein, director of photography

### **‘Like a feature film for the small screen’**

#### **Now that you’ve had some years of experience with Dolby Vision HDR, what is your overall impression of the format?**

CR: It’s such a good way to get your vision on the screen. For this project, we really pushed a lot of things like the wide-angle shots, things that perhaps producers or actors might not like, but nobody had anything bad to say. Dolby Vision HDR really help tell the emotional story of the actor. It can amplify their performance without being intrusive.

SK: There were some great moments: a scene in a bar where we perfectly captured that *Blade Runner* atmosphere of long shafts of light, and a beach scene where you can feel the heat and the sun, all adding to the emotional feel of the show.

CR: Or a night scene where we didn’t do any moonlighting, just used haze from behind and a couple of principals. You can do so much with darkness and if

you take a character from deep shade to sunlight, you can practically blind the audience. Dramatic.

It was a tough shoot. We worked very hard but Dolby Vision HDR made it easier to get what we wanted. The producers were super happy with it. When we finished the grading, I was already onto the next project, but the producer wrote and said: “That felt cinematic, like a big-screen feature film picture for the small screen,” which was a very nice compliment.