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ASTRONAUTS CAPTURE
HUBBLE 3-D

2010 SUNDANCE
FILM FESTIVAL

American Cinematographer

The International Journal of Motion Imaging

APRIL 2010

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

DARIUSZ WOLSKI, ASC GOES
DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE



color-correction, de Lumen smoothed out uneven lamp temperatures, finessed varying skin tones, and fine-tuned white walls, which predominate in the house. The festival print was struck on Fuji Eterna-CP 3513DI.

As significant as *Southern District's* technical challenges were, the project's biggest challenge was devising a whole new visual language and trusting that the audience would "get it," says de Lumen. "I'd been shooting commercials, where you need to get something across in 30 seconds. You tell viewers what they want to feel. *Southern District* does the opposite." He acknowledges that there were moments when he feared the movie's style might seem pretentious, boring or even dizzying. It wasn't until several scenes were cut together that he and Valdivia were completely convinced of the rightness of their approach. "The more I watch the film, the more I respect Juan Carlos for having the guts to stick with it," says de Lumen.

— Patricia Thomson

Cane Toads: The Conquest 3-D

Cinematographers:

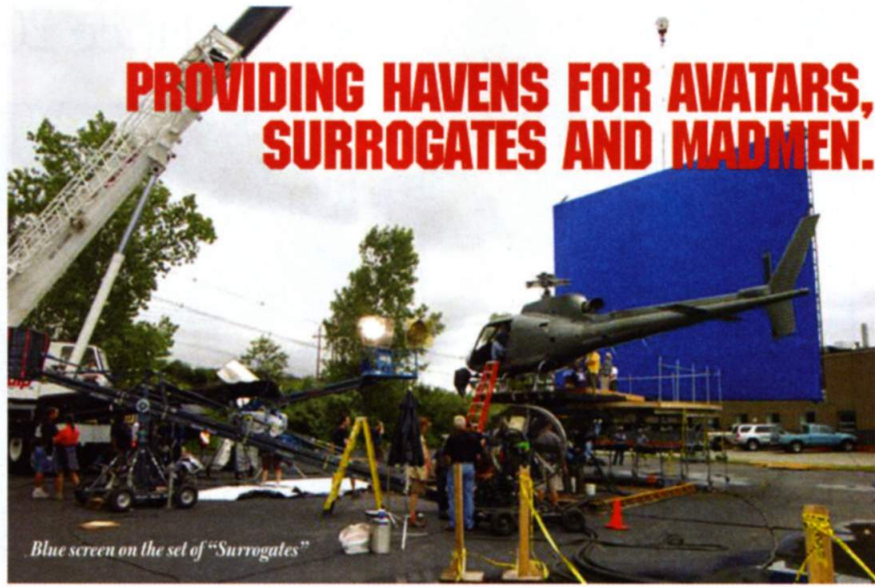
Toby Oliver, ACS;
Kathryn Milliss; and
Paul Nichola

Director: Mark Lewis

1935 marks Year Zero for one of Australia's biggest environmental disasters: 102 cane toads were introduced into the country as the solution to the Greyback Cane Beetle, which was decimating the Queensland sugar-cane industry. Despite their reputation as voracious devourers of living and dead matter, the toads had other ideas. Instead of eliminating the beetle, they utilized their other voracious appetite — breeding — and today, an estimated 1.5 billion toads have migrated across Northern Australia, with no end in sight to their continental conquest.

Mark Lewis' *Cane Toads: The Conquest* was the first 3-D feature to screen at Sundance, and the first Australian feature to shoot in 3-D.

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Paz Fabrega, 2006 MA Filmmaking graduate. Paz's first feature *Agua fría de mar* won the Tiger Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival 2010. She was selected for the 2009 Cannes Cinefondation Residence programme.

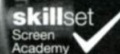
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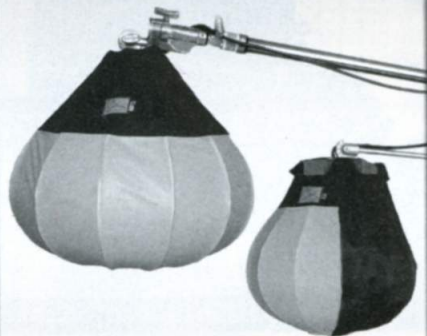
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Sundance 2010: Expanded Palettes



Australia's cane-toad population takes center stage in the 3-D feature *Cane Toads: The Conquest*.

Lewis initially began shooting in 2-D when the production company, Participant Media, nixed his 3-D pitch, but 3-D eventually ended up back on the table, and Lewis and his cinematographers — Toby Oliver, ACS; Kathryn Milliss; and Paul Nichola (who was also the stereo and visual-effects supervisor) — had only a short time to put the logistics into place.

Framing for an aspect ratio of 1.85:1, the filmmakers used Silicon Imaging SI-2K Mini cameras mounted on 3-D mirror rigs. A proprietary P+S Technik 3-D rig was used for interviews, while Nichola used “a fair amount of unconventional methodology to construct rigs for shooting underwater, from vehicles, off a crane, with deep focus and in macro shots, and, most importantly, to capture the toads’ POV,” he says.

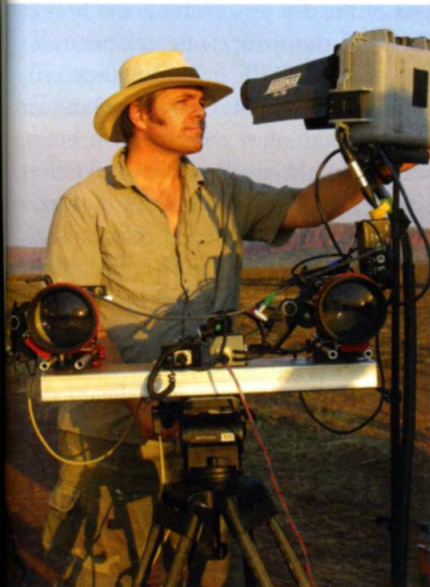
“Each rig was designed to establish the required interocular,” continues Nichola. “We could also converge slightly, but there was never an intention to fully converge because we knew we would finish with a 1920x1080 image size. The additional pixels provided by the SI-2K allowed a modest amount of room for shifting without enlarging. It wasn’t feasible or necessary to have

precision alignment. The left eye was used as the master simply because we had to pick one, and we were going to put the right eye through a transform pass.

“The key aesthetic for the documentary was that the lenses were almost always at the toads’ eyeline or lower — we often crane from a toad to reveal a new background vista,” he continues. To achieve these shots, Nichola constructed the “Mini-Rig,” which Digital Solutions’ Ben McNiell describes as “the best example of how we custom-built rigs to be smaller than what was commercially available. We used SI-2Ks with a set of 1-inch machine-vision lenses from a U.S. company called Kowa; they cover a bigger image area than the CMOS chips, which allowed Paul the option of optically converging the lenses. That meant he could shoot parallel, which was another plus. The toad was typically about 300mm from the lens.” The Kowas were also used for macro shots, which Nichola achieved by installing an extension barrel to pull the lenses away from the body.

Another key rig was a rigid side-by-side rig where the cameras could be set up and the pitch corrected. “That rig spent a lot of time on the crane for

Cane Toads: The Conquest photos courtesy of Radio Pictures.



Toby Oliver, ACS checks the 300mm side-by-side rig used to capture some shots.

grand vistas," recalls Nichola.

"The SI-2Ks were rigged with a PL mount in the first block [of filming], but there were questions raised about the back-focus, so we changed to B4 mounts for the second block," he continues. "There was also a lot of testing of zoom lenses. In the second block of the shoot, we changed to primes, which were more manageable. The primes did shift laterally as focus was pulled, but to my mind, that didn't matter, because with Mark's predilection for proscenium compositions with locked-off shots, focus pulls were rare."

Cane Toads: The Conquest uses a highly structured visual approach. "Mark was looking for a sophisticated visual style based on his trademark offbeat humor — toad POVs, interviewees looking straight at the viewer, and centered compositions that put the viewer face-to-face with the human characters and the toads," says Oliver. Nichola adds, "We set up the 3-D depth range the same as one would establish the area of focus, and the toads worked within those parameters. We carried our own toads everywhere. The only mystery in the equation was what the toads would do in front of the camera;

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