

Short Takes



In the short *Lorne*, the title character (Guy Pearce) has perhaps been alone in the wild for too long.

Campfire Tale

By Michael Wylam

The eponymous lead character (played by Guy Pearce) in the short film *Lorne* has grown paranoid from his extended isolation in the wild. After a lone traveler stumbles across his campfire, Lorne engages the visitor in a monologue, sharing musings and memories, and slowly resolves to face his own existential fears. "Solitude will do that to a man" he remarks.

Director Jesse Leaman had been discussing the story with Pearce for some time before I was hired as the cinematographer. We sought a painterly look that would translate Lorne's psychology into the cinematography while still retaining a sense of dramatic realism, and I wanted to employ subtle cues that would suggest photographically that we were being drawn into the character's world. I like to think of a scene or an act like a symphony: Light and composition are constantly reacting and building to serve the story. I would apply this philosophy to the fractured landscape of Lorne's mind.

We had a limited budget and only one day to shoot the movie, working in a remote forest in Victoria, Australia. The location itself was to be a character, and we found a clearing that gave us the right scenery and background depth for the nighttime campfire scene, which accounts for 13 of the short's 15-minute run time. I was especially taken with a particular plant, *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* — a.k.a. the "grass tree" — which was prevalent in small clusters in this clearing; it had a character I felt was unique and somewhat foreboding, and it would help me in sculpting the space with light. Leaman remarked that my British sensibilities and foreigner's eye lent fresh discovery and meaning to a familiar landscape.

Just beyond the woods, we happened to find an old, abandoned Melbourne tram sitting solemnly in a large field. Inside stood a warped upright piano, decaying but intact. The tram offered a symbolism that instinctively felt right, so Leaman and Pearce masterfully wove this second location into the beginning of the story.

We shot in the tram during the day ahead of our night shoot in the forest. My intention was to introduce a low-key look to this opening daytime scene with soft washes of controlled light brushing through the tram's windows, which further softened the quality of the light, thanks to their age and dust. We shaped the natural daylight look with an Arri M90 HMI through a 4'x4' Full Grid, 6'x6' Half Grid and a 12'x12' Half Grid stacked in the field outside the tram. Inside, we also rigged 2' four-bank Kino Flos with double 216 diffusion and an egg crate, giving us a soft, controlled light to complement the M90 in specific places. We then arranged cutters and negative fill to create subtle layers of shadow and subtraction for Pearce to move through, lending some further character and realism to the scene.

This additional location allowed us to expand *Lorne's* physical and psychological geography, and helped us give the camerawork itself a story arc. The upcoming forest scene would comprise point-of-view shots from the visitor's perspective, so here in the tram I sought a compositional language that would guide the viewer into Lorne's complex emotional world. A series of lingering frames punctuate the opening of the film, and then the camera loosens up, reflecting Lorne's headspace as he starts to feel at ease and settles in near the old piano.

At the sudden sound of a gunshot, Lorne flees the tram and runs across the field. A long drone shot follows Lorne from a bird's-

Photos by Matt Dunne, courtesy of the filmmakers.



Photo by: Claudette Barius Copyright: Twentieth Century Fox

Light Grading

Unleash your creativity with DS modular lighting platform. Grade and manage lights remotely with DS Light Grading app using a color wheel based visual toolset.

"The ability to precisely mix any color within seconds without having to change gels is not only a huge time saver, it became my on-set color grading tool."

Markus Förderer, Director of Photography "Independence Day: Resurgence"



14700 Ventura Blvd, Sherman Oaks, Los Angeles, CA 91403 / Phone: +1 818 262 9284
info@digitalsputnik.com www.digitalsputnik.com

 Digital Sputnik



Top: Lorne finds a disused piano in an abandoned tram. **Middle:** The crew readies the tram location. **Bottom:** Cinematographer Michael Wylam (center) meters the light inside the tram.

eye perspective, which stands in juxtaposition to the intimacy developed in the tram. This sense of dissociation grows as he nears the expanse of forest and the camera tilts up to fully reveal the landscape.

This aerial shot was expertly handled by Jack Garnett, who used a DJI Inspire 1 drone and its integrated 4K camera, recording onto MiniSD cards. Our primary camera for the movie was a Red Epic Mysterium-X, and we were concerned about the drone camera's ability to match the Epic's footage. Due to the time of day and weather conditions, we had to boost the drone camera's ISO out of its comfort zone to 400, but we were able to do a de-noise pass during post-production to help the shot match.

My approach to our nighttime forest scene was to light as naturally as possible while introducing subtle permutations to mirror Lorne's mental state. This was achieved to some degree in the grade — working with colorist Edel Rafferty at Method Studios — as we shifted from a silvery moonlight to a more cyan look that contrasted with the golden tones of Lorne's campfire, pushing the world into a feeling of unease. Our budget didn't allow for the use of helium balloons, and in fact our lighting plan was limited by the combined 12K maximum capacity of our two 6K generators. And, as happens, much of what we planned during preproduction evolved during the blocking. Working with gaffer Tom Savige and his crew, we were able to react quickly, without prolonging our setup time.

Our key light as Pearce approached

The moment when a zoom becomes your prime.
This is the moment we work for.



// FLEXIBILITY
MADE BY ZEISS

ZEISS Compact Zoom CZ.2 Lenses deliver prime performance.

Open up new creative options for your work with versatile zoom lenses built to ZEISS standards. Our Compact Zooms deliver consistent performance across the zoom range and are color-matched to our prime lenses. Their superior flare suppression, full-frame coverage and interchangeable mounts make them suitable for virtually any setup or application that demands true cine-style quality.

www.zeiss.com/cine/compactzoom



We make it visible.

The paranoid Lorne confronts a lone traveler.



the campsite was a battery-powered Kino Flo Celeb dimmed to 24 percent, with 216 diffusion on the barn doors and pushed through a 4'x4' frame of 216. We rigged 14 Kino tubes, wrapped in double 250 diffusion, on tree branches outside of frame to punctuate key areas of the action and to emulate soft moonlight spilling through the forest canopy. A four-bank Kino Flo served as a kicker on Pearce, which we diffused for close-ups. We also placed one M18 HMI deep in the background to give an edge to the foliage, and another to rake through the forest. Other, smaller lights — reading 3-5 stops under key — were placed deep in the background for added depth in a 360-degree move. Additionally, a Robe Fog 1500 FT smoke machine fitted with two 30m-long and 400mm-wide lay-flat tubes provided an even spread of subtle atmosphere.

John Sanders' special-effects team worked with the art department to dig two flame bars into the set so I could control the levels and placement of our firelight. This was supplemented with gold stipple, which Savage nimbly edged into the negative side during each take, helping to wrap the firelight around Pearce's face. We shot the night exterior with three Zeiss Super Speed Mark III primes — 18mm, 50mm and 85mm — and for each focal length, we let the entire 13-minute scene play out in one complete take. We therefore had to adjust the intensity of the firelight over the course of each take, and Sanders had to rig the gas cylinders 15m away from the flame bars, which introduced a delay in our onscreen adjustments, requiring precise timing and forethought.

Because the forest scene is entirely from the visitor's point of view, the camera had to be a character and, as I was operating, my "performance" had to include subtle cues and reactions. Pearce and I quickly found a rhythm with our 13-minute takes. I enjoyed this "dance," and I was constantly impressed with 1st AC Austin Haigh's ability to keep things sharp as we jumped over bushes and other obstacles while reacting instinctively to Pearce's performance. I shot at a stop of T2, and we used the shallow depth of field and occasional dips in focus to our advantage, underscoring the main character's loose grasp on reality.

After testing, we decided to shoot at 5K resolution and 5:1 compression, recording to RedMag SSDs. We set the Epic's ISO to 1,280 for the night scene and the camera's native 800 for the day scene. We were amazed at how little noise we saw in the night footage and found there was no need to apply any de-noising in post.

We chose to frame for the 2.39:1 aspect ratio because we liked the way it places a single character in an environment, lending emptiness and a sense of encroaching danger — room for paranoia — to the frame. And we opted for spherical because we didn't want the weight, stop limitations and depth of field inherent to anamorphic. I also particularly like the softness and reduced contrast the Super Speed lenses deliver when paired with digital formats; we further molded character into the image with a range of Tiffen Digital Diffusion/FX filters, which enhanced the painterly look I wanted.

We sought a slightly aged palette of

desaturated greens and golds, which would ground the short in an earthy tone and place Lorne within the environment as if he had become part of it. We treated the footage very lightly in the grade, as much of the look was achieved in-camera. Working with Blackmagic Design's DaVinci Resolve, Rafferty delicately executed the subtle nuances we sought. For the campfire scene, I referenced some of Laszlo Kovacs, ASC's work on *Easy Rider*, but overall the look was inspired by a painting called "The Sheepfold, Moonlight," by Jean-François Millet. The moonlight in the painting has a glowing, pearlescent quality to it that really resonated with me.

Although our means were limited — as they always are on a short project — our crew in all departments were exceptional, and realizing our shared vision within our limitations was every bit as exhilarating as it was challenging. It was also a pleasure collaborating with Leaman and Pearce; we all trusted and pushed each other to find the truth in the scene. Creativity blesses a set when like-minded people come together to craft a story that you hope will resonate with an audience. I truly believe that on-set atmosphere translates to magic in the frame. This project had a unique vision from the outset, and seeing it realized on the big screen recently was an extremely rewarding experience. It was a great honor to be a part of.

The trailer for Lorne can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/leamanfilms/lornetrailer>.