

## Production Notes

### **THE TRACKER DIARY - by Rolf de Heer**

#### **PRE-PRODUCTION**

**Tuesday, February 20th, 2001**

The middle of the last week of pre-production...hard to imagine we'll be shooting in a week.

This has been the most complex film for locations that I can remember, and for the strangest reason - too many to choose from.

Back in October, when we (location/unit manager Chris Corin and I) went on a preliminary survey, I'd thought we'd be shooting in different, scattered parts of the Flinders Ranges, and perhaps in the Musgrave Ranges as well. Our first efforts in the Flinders soon revealed an essential problem...there was almost no vehicle access to any high points, hence any vistas or landscapes we'd want to capture would prove very difficult indeed.

I had no fewer than 27 military maps with me, covering the entire Flinders Ranges. After the first fruitless day and half, I studied these maps very carefully, in the Caravan Park at Hawker (we'd camped that night). On the 26th map I struck paydirt..."Forget all this Chris, we're going to Arkaroola!"

Arkaroola lies in the very northern part of the Flinders, next to the Gammon Ranges National Park, about 130 kms east of Leigh Creek. Being unwise in the ways of the Northern Flinders, Chris and I took the most direct route, through Wilpena and past Chamber's Gorge.

Less than half way there we had our first flat tyre. The rather worn spare went on, but I privately thought, "Won't last 50kms...". I was wrong. Exactly 52 kms later, the spare deflated and disintegrated.

Stuck, on a dirt backroad about 80kms from our destination. Plenty of food, plenty of water, but no tyres, and time ticking away.

At noon a large four wheel drive campervan rattled past, stopped, and offered a lift to Leigh Creek (170kms away) where the couple from East Gippsland were going to have

their tyre fixed before continuing on into the inland. I accepted, taking the tyre, while Chris stayed with the stricken vehicle.

By 4pm I was in Leigh Creek with a fixed tyre and no way of getting back to the vehicle and Chris. A mail van went almost all the way, but only in the mornings. The school bus went half way, but it had already left. Maybe tomorrow morning...but tomorrow was Saturday...no mail van, no school bus. There were no taxis, no cars to hire, no cars to buy even. I'd have to hitch.

The East Gippsland couple came out of the garage with their fixed tyre and took pity..."Hop in and we'll take you back." It was an extraordinary offer, selfless, kind, unexpected, and one I had no choice but to accept. Thus we rattled the three hours all the way back from where we'd just come.

We arrived back at (a very bored) Chris just on dusk. In the seven hours I'd been gone, he'd been passed by just one car and one bicycle (one of those riding-round-Australia-on-a bicycle people, usually either French or Japanese). At times like this you realise just what a big country this is (the road on which we'd been stranded is marked on maps as a fairly major road).

Got to Arkaroola well after dark, pitched the tents, disposed of a snake under one of them, cooked, ate, fought the flies and mosquitoes, tried to sleep. The tents almost blew away. What a glamorous life this film making is.

Next morning we woke to Arkaroola, and within an hour we knew that the whole film could be shot here... extraordinary, extraordinary country.

Until recently, when dating techniques improved, Arkaroola was the oldest known place on earth, 1.9 billion years old. What's there is what's left after time has gone to work on a mountain range as high as the Himalayas, and just worn it down and worn it down. It looks old, it feels old, it almost smells old.

Everywhere you looked, in every direction, were possible locations (when you're looking for locations, you see the whole world in terms of potential or otherwise for a location...every spot you look at, no matter how interesting or mundane, is either a possible location, a likely location or an area not to be considered for a location), good, viable, accessible locations,

magnificent locations, high locations, low locations, varied locations.

It is now some four months since that discovery, we've been back four times, and each time it becomes harder to come back to the city, despite the heat, the difficult conditions, the flies.

In the script there are almost seventy specific locations to be decided upon, and they have to fit together in such a way that they make sense of the narrative of the film...this is a road movie without roads, a journey over perhaps three hundred kilometres, but the locations at Arkaroola are such that you wouldn't expect to find this degree of variation in anything but a much longer journey, let alone within a radius of ten kilometres.

There is an embarrassment of riches, and the question was, how do we co-ordinate this in such an isolated place? How do I keep track of the many places that are possibilities, and then choose the best for each particular scene? How do I keep them in the right order for the film, how do we find them again?

The answer lay in a mixture of old and new technology. A digital stills camera, laptop and colour printer on the one hand, and an old-fashioned map and compass on the other hand.

We took stills of everything that might be appropriate, downloaded them, cropped them into anamorphic (cinemascope) screen ratio, printed them out and, as the air conditioner struggled to keep things cooler than the 43 degrees it was outside, we stuck them onto the wall of the room we were staying in (we'd fortunately graduated from tents by this stage).

Soon one wall was thick with interesting pictures. The other wall was by this time sparsely covered by labels, of the scenes for which new locations were required. As time went on, choices were made, and pictures taken from the random wall and placed onto the specific wall.

When we'd photographed all the waterholes at Arkaroola, for example, I made choices about the three I would use. Their suitability for the scene was a factor, their degree of shooting ease/difficulty, distance for the horses to walk, distance for the crew to drive and/or walk, likelihood of water still being in them in up to ten weeks' time, and so on. Eventually I'd chosen my three waterholes. Then the locations for the scenes

leading up to these water holes could be chosen, or for the scenes immediately after, or, where that may already be specifically known, the need for some sort of landscape transition shot would become apparent. And so it went, until all the gaps in the specific wall were filled, and cadence of the landscape in the film determined.

Tomorrow the emphasis will shift, from the landscape to the people within it. Two of the actors, Gary Sweet and Damon Gameau, will come in for makeup and hair tests (one of the actors, Grant Page, is still in India, not back in Australia till the weekend, while David Gulpilil, the lead, is still in Arnhem Land). The actors...they're now the key to how this film will work.

### **Wednesday, February 21st, 2001**

A mixed and muddled day of pre-production in Adelaide, ultimately satisfying.

Long discussions with the first assistant director (Karen Mahood) about how to run the shoot...the trickiest aspect of this is how formal to be with this (or rather, perhaps from her point of view, how casual I'm likely to get).

First Assistant directors are paid to organise the running of the set, hence Karen is effectively paid to organise me. I'm not too easy to organise: I generally know what I want but don't like to be constricted by the ritual of a shoot; I know how I intend to get it but sometimes fail to communicate this adequately. Too often I drift along on the assumption that everyone knows as well as I do that which is in fact in my head and in my head alone. This can, at times, lead to serious misunderstandings.

But on this shoot we are released from many of the constraints of conventional film making.

The crew is quite, quite small, about a quarter the size of many crews, which means that getting around, changing locations, isn't a matter of packing up a circus, moving it, and setting up the same circus somewhere else.

We also have the entire principal cast with us at all times, all of them working each day, and therefore if we want to make sudden change, we can. Their wardrobe is virtually identical for each day of the shoot, the "sets" (the locations) aren't in any way reliant on an art

department building or adapting them or having to decorate them. They're all there, waiting patiently to be used.

There are no last minute arrangements to be made, for almost anything...no traffic to be blocked (or permission to be obtained to do so), no props to be found, no changing of location contracts to fit in with an unexpectedly changed schedule.

All this gives us tremendous flexibility, much more than the average shoot, and it makes me particularly wary of over-organisation. Quite some time was spent discussing the level of actual organisation needed, and what might be the optimum balance between formal work methods and a more improvisatory approach.

It's often difficult for a good First A.D. to release aspects of the shoot to what appears to them to be chance. So far Karen is showing signs of being able to cope.

Theoretical discussions of work procedure were interrupted by the arrival of the Fanatic and the Follower, in the persons of Gary Sweet and Damon Gameau respectively. Here for make-up and hair, to define their "look" for the film, we spend much of the time getting excited about the impending shoot...the location photo wall is an immediate point of interest for both actors.

Gary simply gets more revved up than he already is...this is a film he really wants to do, is very deeply committed to, and the location pictures bring it tantalisingly closer. Damon, a film novice but well-trained (NIDA) and talented, makes the observation that there may not be much need for actual acting in some of those locations, that simply being there will make the right things happen. I think he has a point.

Then haircuts, Beverley (Freeman, makeup/hair/wardrobe and props) doing them a stage at a time so that we don't go irreversibly too far. This too is exciting, as the first external layer is added to the characters they've so far only been able to internalise.

Haircuts are interrupted by the arrival of the neckchains, those now-loathsome (then too?) implements of restraint designed for convicts, suspects and Aborigines, but still being used on the latter more than a century after their use for the former had been discontinued.

The neckchains have been made for us by Lee, a modern-day blacksmith who specialises in making theatrical props. They're pretty well a genuine item the way he's done them, and the jocularity ceases while the implication of the things seeps through. Gary tries one on...we shake our heads in a collective and belated "sorry", that word that some seem to find so difficult to say.

Ian Jones (director of photography) pops his head in. He's concerned about the comfort of the actors, so the chain is fastened to his neck and he tries it out around the corridors of the South Australian Film Corporation studio building.

The neckchain passes Ian's comfort test, but privately I wonder...David Gulpilil will be wearing one almost constantly for the best part of two weeks, Gary Sweet for a week. What of chafing, and blisters, and rubbing the skin red raw? It's going to happen, I'm sure. What to do about it will become the question.

#### **Thursday, February 22nd, 2001**

As far as these days can be, this was, for the second last day of pre-production prior to setting off for Arkaroola, a "normal" day. Normal but exhausting...can't think why.

One forgets so easily...doing, on average, one film every two years, 5% of one's working life is spent in pre-production, at almost two year intervals, so that by the time you get round to doing it again, you've forgotten most of what you learnt the previous time. Most of all, one forgets the questions.

The thing that reminds you most that you're in serious pre-production is the constant barrage of questions. Finding within oneself the answers to the myriad of questions posed is what consumes most of one's time and energy. Every department has questions, hundreds of them, and the director is meant to be able to answer most of them (and often can't, because he or she hasn't begun to think about this or that particular subject).

"How long do you want the Follower's hair?" ("Short, I guess.") "How short?" ("Uhhh, half the length it is now." - this is in fact a good answer, because it is specific and prevents immediate further questions.) "How much Fuller's Earth do you want?" (this question is trouble

because I haven't got a clue: 1 kg? 50kgs? Fuller's Earth is used to make dust, and there are a couple of scenes that will benefit greatly with the addition of dust, but I have not the slightest idea how much does what..."Uhhh, how much does it cost?" Again I think this is a good answer because it'll keep someone busy for a while finding out.) "Where do you get Fuller's Earth?" (Yeah, should've guessed that was coming..."Uhhh, hang on, I'll make a phone call" - I remember on 'Incident at Raven's Gate' we used a lot of dust, so I ring the Special Effects Co-ordinator on that, John Armstrong, who has remained a good friend since then. The advice is not to use Fuller's Earth, but #3 grade talc, available from such and such at about \$7 a 20kg bag - cheaper by far than I'd imagined..."I want 3 bags of #3 grade talc instead of the Fuller's Earth, you can get it at such and such.") An hour later, a phone call..."There are two shades available, a sort of white and a sort of light brown...which do you want?" ("Uhhh, get the sort of white stuff because we're going to have to colour it anyway and if it's white we can probably get to the required shade a bit more easily.")

And so the day passes, question after question after question, about major issues and about microscopic detail.

Three highlights today other than the usual "normality". The first is the costume fitting for the Fanatic and the Follower.

Initially a problem...the specially made boots of the period take impossibly long to put on and to take off. They have to be modified, otherwise we'll waste upward of half an hour of shooting time a day. The maker of them, the grandson of an old cobbler who used to make them when they were contemporary, has a solution...zips down the back of them with a flap of leather to cover the zips.

Then the rest of the costume...both characters come to life again as they put on the clothes they'll be wearing for seven weeks...the differences in their characters, although both are mounted police, is sharply delineated by the differences in their costume. And they both look fantastic, a real thrill. A short fashion parade around the office confirms my thoughts that this is working well (or is everyone merely thrilled to see the production come to life?).

A break for questions and it's off to the rifle range, to sort out the gun situation and for Gary and Damon to get

some practice handling and shooting. That's a thrill for Damon (first time he's fired a gun) and a lesson for me...even the blanks are capable of causing great damage (think Brandon Lee) and the demonstration of this by the armourer and the gun instructors has me thinking straightaway about how to differently cover the scenes involving shooting.

The final highlight is an extra two pages of script, effectively a new scene. For weeks I've had a little idea nagging away at me, and somehow this little idea had attached itself to a particular location. I checked the scene that we were meant to shoot in that location, and no way would the idea fit with that scene. But the idea refused to go away.

So late in the afternoon I found myself sitting under a tree just outside the office, adding little notes to my script, small thoughts that I accumulate during the day, especially when being driven in a car (it becomes increasingly unsafe for me to be driving at all this close to a shoot...I'll be walking along a creekbed at Arkaroola and suddenly wake up about to run into the back of a truck).

Whilst jotting I came to the particular scene in question, and the jottings in the margin became more elaborate. I found myself writing an extension to the scene that was there, and all the things that had prevented the idea from fitting could be incorporated into the extension and were now supporting the idea.

The new scene scribbled in pencil on the back of the previous page, I walked back into the office, sat behind a computer and wrote it out properly, but not before checking the schedule to see what sort of a mess this would make to our future planning. I was in luck...with just the slightest change in approach to both this scene and the other scene to be shot on the same day, we should comfortably be able to shoot the new material without disrupting the schedule at all.

The scene went into the machine, keys were pressed and it came out in written form. People read it and were pleased (or at least they said they were pleased, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference).

A pleasant way to end the day...it always amazes me how hard the subconscious mind works, and in this case it must have been working overtime.



Not quite the end of the day...here I am, sitting in the office at 11.15 at night, typing more words into a computer. I've been home, had dinner with the family, helped the kids with their homework (French, maths and English). The building is almost deserted, but down the corridor I hear the sound of Judd (Judd Overton, the clapper loader) patiently working away at the cameras and the lenses, making sure that everything is in as good a shape as it can be. If we have equipment failures during the shoot, it won't be for lack of effort by Judd to prevent this.

## **Tuesday, 27 February, 2001**

Up at 4.30 in a Canberra hotel this morning, after an Australian Film Commission Board meeting and reception for politicians at Parliament House. Plane to Adelaide, charter flight to Balcanoonna to join the crew, who travelled yesterday.

Chris picked me up from the barren airstrip, and suddenly I didn't want to go...didn't want to be in Arkaroola, didn't want the questions, didn't want to do the mothering of all and sundry, with everyone wanting their piece of attention from me, their piece of me. I wanted to be home with my family.

A few stories started to come...five flat tyres simply on the way in to Arkaroola (and that's on the good road), the mobile coolroom ruptured a hose and was non-functional, the oven in the catering van had ceased working as a result of the rough journey, it had been 43 degrees yesterday, blah blah blah blah. I wanted even less to go.

I hate shooting. I love the writing, like the pre-production (on this film, loved the pre-production), love the post-production (I tell myself during the worst times of any shoot, "It's okay, you get to do the sound mix on this"), but overall I hate shooting. And during the forty or so minutes from Balcanoonna to Arkaroola, I hated shooting more than ever.

Out with the defense mechanisms..."Only seven weeks to go"; "Just break it into little pieces, don't think about the whole, just a day at a time" (that one courtesy of an impassioned speech to me by Andrew Swanson, ex the WAFC, when I had the wobbles on "Dingo" - it helped at the time).

So I thought only about tomorrow, and tomorrow wasn't such a bad day on the schedule really...(we'll see).

Once at Arkaroola, all thoughts of misery and self pity vanished. There was energy, and joy at being there, and order being fashioned out of chaos. Everyone seemed happy, everyone was there, everyone was working and no one wanted a piece of me (well, almost no one in the first hour).

After lunch a survey...no one other than Chris and I had seen any of the locations, and I'd seen some of them for only a minute or two. So Karen, Ian, Chris, Grant, Bill (the master horse wrangler) and I set off, to look at stuff for the next three days and work out likely problems. Not too hot (perhaps 35 or 37), not too difficult (though a fair climb up one escarpment), fairly pleasant, really.

The climb was considered possible but difficult for the horses, very difficult but worth it for the crew carrying equipment. Altogether a sense of the film process loomed.

Late for dinner because of yet another flat tyre (always the same wheel, the rear driver's side), and early to bed prior to the first day. No nerves left, really...

## **SHOOT**

**Wednesday, February 28th, 2001**

Oh the chaos of the first day of shoot...

It should always be expected, of course, and no amount of preparation seems to be able to avoid it, but it's always surprising what manages to go wrong.

Departure time was scheduled for 0615, to a relatively benign location about 8km away (6km by good dirt road, 2km by 4WD dirt road). I learnt during the day that there is no such thing as a benign location here at Arkaroola, only difficult ones and very difficult ones (and probably a few extremely difficult ones).

One of the actors (he shall remain nameless) had set his alarm for 0630 instead of 0530. He recovered well upon being woken and barely made a dent in the day. Then the little convoy of vehicles (to be guided to location) was delayed when the sound vehicle (which was also the

designated emergency/ambulance vehicle) failed to start...flat battery.

Problem fairly swiftly solved by Owen (Love, unit etc), but it made little difference, because part of the way into the 4WD track, the grip ute lost its load and blocked everyone behind it. Fifteen or twenty minutes to repack and re-tie (more firmly this time) and on the way again. Six minutes later, the grip ute lost its load again and blocked everyone behind it.

By seven thirty (it was intended to be a sunrise shot, and by now the sun was shining) everyone was on location, except unit, which had had to return to base to get coffee (yes, it seems to be possible to forget the coffee). The horses had arrived, having been walked in via a shortcut, the camera was in position (having been in the convoy ahead of the grips truck) and the final preparations were being made to the "look" of the horse/actor combinations...this first shot was of importance, it would set the looks for almost the rest of the film.

Uh-oh, the Follower's shirt was missing. The actors had ridden the horses in with Bill Willoughby, had not been in full wardrobe yet, and somehow, in the chaos of everyone trying to depart from the same place at the same time, it had been left behind. A mercy "dash" (dashes aren't really possible, nor wise to attempt, on these tracks) back to base for the shirt.

And so it went. The urn for the hot water, which had worked back at base, refused to function on location, and we never did see any coffee on the day. But the day was just warm, not the searing heat of two days ago, and spirits remained high.

The first shot went through its paces and the film came to life...the Tracker on foot out in front, David Gulpilil looking magnificent as he always does; then Gary Sweet, he IS the Fanatic, a consummate horseman, confident and focussed; then Damon Gameau, following as the Follower does, not quite overwhelmed by it all but not far from it; and finally Grant Page leading the packhorse, the gnarled face of the Philosopher having seen it all before. We were, in that remote spot with those actors, suddenly back eighty years in time.

Too much happens in each day to fully describe even the highlights. In the afternoon we gave the horse-mounted steadicam a run, and all the attendant difficulties of

making a new rig work in more than theory were there. Results though seem likely to be worth the trouble.

And we had our first on-set accident. About to do our first shot for the afternoon, Damon mounted his horse and was handed his ukulele (the Follower occasionally plays it, even on horseback). He gave it a strum, which so surprised his horse that it reared up and lunged forward, leaving Damon tumbling straight down to earth, which was in a creekbed and covered with fragments of jagged rocks. Beverley Freeman was also bowled over in the ensuing melee.

It could have been a catastrophe, and almost was, but we were lucky...Damon landed on the sound transmitter strapped to his back, smashing it but probably preventing injuries to him more serious than bruises and a few scrapes. Beverley was also bruised, but no more than by life itself, and her sunny disposition was unaffected.

We dropped one small scene for the day (which would have involved a location move and is easily picked up later), but the results for the day were probably highly satisfactory (I'll wait for final judgement until I see them on the big screen).

Meanwhile several off-set catastrophes were also happening. Evangeline (Feary, our most wondrous caterer) was having the hardest time of it. The broken coolroom had not yet been fixed and the Arkaroola coolroom, generously lent to get us out of trouble, was cooler than expected and turned all of Evangeline's carefully selected herbs into compost. The truck with the main food supply had not yet arrived, and there was doubt that there'd be enough food for lunch.

And, at the end of the day, the relatively local extras for the rest of the shoot, including for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, suddenly de-materialised. Finding the right extras in the time available for this truly isolated location will now be a major task, and is likely to eat into our (at this stage still healthy) contingency.

Still, the accumulation of images has begun and we escaped the first day's chaos relatively unscathed. As Owen would say, "Too easy!" As Gary would say, "No worries!" As I would say, "We'll see..."

**Thursday, March 1, 2001**

Day two of the shoot, and already the feeling is different, it's progressed. Breakfast was less jovial, more focussed on the day ahead, as if everyone began to realise that there are going to be no easy days, but each day will be worth the effort.

And today was certainly a physically more difficult day than yesterday. The first shot meant the separation of actors and camera by a distance of six kilometres. An eight hundred millimetre lens was pointed at an escarpment far, far away. On that slope were the horses and actors, in contact by radio. Even with a lens of that length, they were barely more than specks on the hillside.

Whilst our little camera crew of three (Ian, Judd and myself) waited for horses and actors to find their way to the designated spot, we could see tiny points of light slowly climbing the slope further down...the rest of the crew was carting equipment, water and supplies to the top - the 4WDs had gone as far as they could, and the rest was simply a hard slog to the top. I felt for the crew way over there, as I'd done the climb myself several times on surveys, unburdened, and even then it was hard enough.

Eventually all was ready, and we did a take. General conditions were cloudy with the odd little patch of sun, so we waited for fifteen minutes to do a second take in full sun. That achieved, we packed up the camera and drove to join the main body of the crew.

Up to the top we climbed (this time also burdened), to find quite a little community set up there, despite the transportational difficulties...coffee, shelter, food, more equipment than it turned out we'd need. Straight into setting up the next shots, wherein each of the four characters is introduced.

These seemingly simple setups (camera on tripod, pointed down the ridge, the characters walk towards it from a distance of about 75 metres, on horseback or on foot as appropriate) were actually fairly complex. We were on the long end of the zoom, so the depth of field for focus continually narrowed as the character came closer, reducing ultimately to barely a few centimetres - David Dunkley, pulling focus, had his work cut out for him. Measurements were made and remade, focus marks set up and adjusted, both on the camera and on the ground, more fiddles made as the thickening cloud cover reduced the

amount of light and hence the depth of field even further.

Another degree of difficulty was introduced by "ramping" the camera speed at a particular point in the shot. As the camera speed is increased (creating a slow motion effect), the aperture has to be reduced by a mathematically similar amount to compensate for the film being exposed for less time, even further reducing focus depth of field. Judd was charged with the ramping/aperture duties, and he too was under pressure to perform.

By the time all was ready we'd had lunch, and the cloud cover was very thick indeed...not ideal for the shots, but since these shots were about faces rather than landscape, we could live with it.

Finally shooting, and the material seemed to me to be good...David Dunkley sweated on his focus, Judd was a picture of concentration on his double ramping, and Damon (the Follower) had his by now usual problems of accurately steering the direction of his horse whilst simultaneously playing the ukulele (he's a better ukulele player than he is a rider), but the nature of the shot was forgiving in that regard.

The high ridge we were on gave us a huge view in almost every direction, and the view was not a pretty one - we could see heavy rain about ten kilometres away, gradually making its way towards us. The light fell further, and suddenly there was an urgency about the shooting. With the essentials in the can and a scattering of heavy drops already falling, the big scramble down the mountain was called. Heavy rain in these parts means the possibility of becoming rapidly stranded.

It's at times like this that the unsung heroes of any shoot shine...Robertto Karas (the gaffer), Mike Smith (the grip), Owen and Chris from unit...all carried and lugged and heaved uncomplainingly (as did everyone else, from unit nurse to painter's wife), until in a surprisingly short time we were in the vehicles and on the way back to base.

Better conditions might have gotten us more material to work with in the editing room, but it was satisfying nevertheless to get the day in, without real incident on set (all that was happening off set, with a most unlikely pair, the producer and the co-ordinator, becoming child minders, but that's another story).

**Friday, March 2, 2001**

Day three of the shoot, and a fine illustration of both the flexibilities and limitations of the schedule.

Shooting is arranged in blocks, around groupings of locations and the transportation of the horses. If a grouping of locations is situated somewhere beyond the easy transportation of horses by truck (i.e., if the roads are too bad), then the horses will camp out until that grouping is completed.

Because a scheduled motion control day has been shifted from tomorrow until deeper into the shoot (availability and preparation time), today and tomorrow are sort of patched together out of bits and pieces. Constructive times though, because we took the opportunity in the morning to survey some key upcoming locations, which no one but Chris and I had yet seen.

Bill and Coop (horse wranglers) tried to find a way up Arkaroola Creek for a shot from a thousand feet higher on Coulthardt's Lookout, while a few of the rest of us took the High Ridge Track to see if the shot would work and to survey other locations for next week.

We had more luck than the horsemen...no way could they get past Arkaroola Waterhole, whilst the High Ridge locations were not only found to be spectacular and workable, but when word came through on the radio from Bill, we found an alternative to that shot that not only worked as well, but that also effectively opened up half a day on the schedule, as the horses were going to be passing through the required spot anyway.

The extras situation (the situation where we don't have any for Monday Tuesday Wednesday) forced a rethink...we (fairly) simply traded the first three days of the week with the last three, giving production an extra three days to source the extras required.

In the afternoon we trekked out to our location, the knoll eight and a half kilometres from yesterday's shoot, from where the Fugitive observes the distant pursuers and where later the Tracker works out they're half a day behind their quarry. A thin layer of clouds lay spread over the sky, which wasn't bad for the Fugitive scene as it would match both the sun and the cloud shots from the previous day. We shot this easily and without incident,

apart from the fact that four kilometres away the horse ute, guiding in the horses, had to backtrack about a kilometre to get out of the shot. We shoot big in this country.

Then it was time for the first dialogue scene of the shoot, intended for late afternoon, almost sunset. Actors on the knoll, everyone else off, and we worked the scene for a bit. It felt like it was going to work okay, especially when the horses would be introduced into the scene.

During this time, the cloud had been thickening, until by now the light was very flat. For a scene early in the film that is meant to have epic landscape qualities, and in a narrative sense has to feel close to the end of the day, this just wasn't good enough. We had time, so we waited.

We waited some more, and the cloud simply got thicker. My mood began to be a reflection of the increasingly sombre conditions, until a cloud in my brain lifted and I realised that these conditions could actually be a match for some dusk shooting that we had to do, shooting that, with a little adaptation and styling, could be done in almost any bit of bush, and here we were surrounded by perfectly good bush.

So the plug was pulled on our first dialogue scene and we galvanised into action for the scenes where the Tracker prepares a potion. People crawled over the hillside looking for red beetles and appropriate berries, while the camera crew set up various cutters and reflectors to give the dusk feel in extreme closeup.

Beetles and berries were found, we shot two unscheduled scenes instead of the one scheduled one, had an early dinner and rescheduled the first dialogue scene for the following day, with great hopes of late afternoon sun instead of all day cloud.

### **Saturday, March 3, 2001**

The glamour of film making...I don't know how people eat breakfast at 5 in the morning, but there they were, attempting to take in some sustenance prior to a dawn shoot. Remarkably enough, most of the crew and cast behaved in a relatively cheerful manner, belying their outward appearance of needing at least another four hours sleep (which most of them probably do).



Dawn shoots mean travelling out to location and setting up while still dark, in this case in a creekbed strewn with boulders and loose bits of dead mulga. They mean being completely ready to shoot the moment there's just sufficient light, and then shooting like hell before the sun comes up, all at a time when most people simply don't function at their best.

In terms of the number of shots to be done I had no expectation of achieving everything prior to sunrise, particularly when there were horses involved. Shooting the material in order however, from the pursuers waking up at their campsite to their leaving, would mean that at least it would make sense, and the shot immediately after this sequence in the script had been our first shot of the shoot, and we'd managed that only well after sunrise as well.

My anxiousness must have shown in the number of times I asked, "Enough light yet Ian?" (he then gets that impish look on his face, a sort of benign and knowing smile, which could mean anything from thank-god-the-director-hasn't-got-a-light-meter to thank-god-this-director-hasn't-got-a-light-meter).

The knowing smile turns to seriousness and the action suddenly begins. First shot is of the Fanatic, a looming point of view of the Follower as he's being woken by a boot in the face. Gary (Sweet) is ready, does it effortlessly.

Next the Follower, asleep, Fanatic's boot in the face, a startled turn up. Damon (Gameau) is still half asleep anyway (in a sensible job we'd all still be asleep) so he too does it effortlessly.

Things are humming along now. The horses have already arrived and are being readied just up the creek, and we quickly skip two shots in the sequence to take advantage of this. While shaving mirrors and Gary, Grant and Damon are being readied for their next shot, we fire off the shot of David (Gulpilil) bringing in the unsaddled horses. These can now be saddled while we go back and pick up the two shots we skipped.

The next shot is ready almost as soon as the camera is in position...everyone is playing their part with precision, there is a calmness but urgency on set which you wish you could bottle. In goes the slate, "Turn over..." says Karen, "Speed..." says Jim (Currie, sound recordist)

"Set..." says Ian, "Action..." says I, and the actors do the rest. "Cut!", gate check, next camera position.

By the time we get to the last shot of the morning, there is some welcome sun on the hill behind, and it's barely seven thirty. Exhilarating shooting, far better than any of us could reasonably have predicted.

With significantly more time on our hands than expected, it's straight into more surveys, in particular for the stunt sequence to be shot at a waterhole in week 5. There are a whole lot of knock-on effects from this. Grant's concern to maintain the highest level of safety while providing a thrilling sequence means that another safety officer will have to be flown in for the day, and the fact that the level of water is dropping by 15 centimetres a week, and no rain can be relied on, means that the sequence will have to be brought forward to the beginning of week 3.

Bill's assessment of the location is that it's difficult but for the most part possible for the horses...certain parts of it will have to be shot elsewhere (more locations for me to find), and for the parts here he'll have to get in some special horse-shoeing material (with tungsten fragments for extra grip). And it's decided that the underwater stuff ought to be shot in more controlled conditions (namely the Arkaroola swimming pool, but don't say anything because we haven't asked the Arkaroola people yet).

Suddenly many departments have much extra work to do. Production have got all sorts of things to organise (and we're not clear yet where the extras for next week will come from). Bill has to not only remember where in his shed at Orreroo he put those tungsten strips at least five years ago, but he has to get them here and then he and Coop have to make horse shoes out of them. Camera has extra equipment to sort out. Karen has a significant reschedule on her hands, without knowing where the new locations will be. I have to find the new locations (when? and where will they fit in the schedule?). And so on (and on).

Off in the afternoon to our little knoll, where the cloud had the previous day stymied our attempt at the first dialogue sequence. Brilliant sunshine, and our problem is the opposite of what it was this morning...how late do we dare to leave it before beginning to shoot the sequence, which has horses in it, dialogue, three camera configurations (on legs, up a ladder, steadicam), and a

number of shots all of which ought to be shot at sunset? The later we leave it, the better the sequence will look...

After this morning's efficiency, we decide we can afford to be more daring - five o'clock we should roll camera on the first shot, giving us a little over two and a half hours to complete the entire scene.

During the wait Grant and I and the actors discuss the up-coming stunt sequence. We analyse, discuss and debate, and by the time we're called to shoot, we've simplified a lot and complicated a little what we're going to be doing, and we're all happy with it.

Up the knoll we walk, talking to David (his is the first shot) about the Tracker, his character and his behaviour. Whatever it is that we've said to each other, it seems to have been right: David is just delightful, alternately focussed, slightly mysterious and very funny, as he should be in this part of the film.

We work through the material methodically, no obvious concern about the sun falling lower and lower in the sky. Gary, as is often the case, hits it on the first take. We go to do another take simply because we can, but a cloud temporarily obscures the sun so we prepare the next setup instead. Damon delivers his first words of dialogue in his first feature film with telling effect, then creates the ending for the scene by trying something in character that works. Grant has the most difficult job, attempting to deliver an undeliverable line of dialogue (I must be more rigorous in not writing exposition), but a quick "Let's drop that second line of dialogue, Grant" soon fixes the problem and he too comes through with flying colours.

We finish the scene with a safe margin of time, and can afford to look around and truly enjoy where we are, which, at this time of day, is just beautiful. In hindsight, yesterday's decision was a terrific one, but luck was only one element. Again everyone had worked efficiently and well, and, even more pleasing, all the actors had delivered at their first real test.

Shooting just doesn't get much better than it did today.

**Monday, March 5, 2001**

Tired as I'm writing this, and I think a few others are too.

We attacked the High Ridge Track today...up almost a thousand feet at the breakneck speed of between 2 and 10 k.p.h. for an early morning scene, then another 16 kms along the same track not much faster for another scene.

Breakfast in the dark, the horses first to go, the rest follow...through a gate that's locked to keep people out because of the risks of inexperienced drivers on this trail, up to a little knoll. We set up and wait for the horses. All that beautiful low sun on the spectacular surrounds was ticking away as we watched, and I expected the horses to be some time yet.

Glad to be wrong on this occasion, because we were barely ready when the horses did arrive, and we swung straight into the scene, dialogue on travelling horseback way above the surrounding mountains. The scene was shot well, and quickly, and suddenly it was only half past nine and most of the day's work had been done.

Up higher still for the next location, a simple large scale travelling shot. The crew is working well now, and within minutes the shade was up, cameras out and ready, sound setting up, water on the camping stove for coffee. Within minutes, however, I discover that getting the horses onto the pre-determined ridge was not a practical possibility: what looked like a ridge adjoining the track, what was shown on the military map as a ridge adjoining the track, was not a ridge adjoining the track. There was, indeed, a deep gap between the track and the ridge.

The idea had been to shoot this and another shot whilst the horses travelled towards the distant location, where they'd camp overnight and where we'd shoot the next day. They'd then spend the following day walking back, during which time we'd shoot another shot.

The speed at which the horses had reached this point had surprised me. It was certainly much faster than predicted. I had a hunch that they'd arrive at their camping spot much earlier than the late afternoon that had been allowed for. On we all went to the next location, probably with nothing to do except work out very carefully the scene for the next day, but maybe, just maybe...

Half an hour before midday the horses arrived at the distant campsite, only one and a half kilometres short of the location. Lunch had arrived and was immediately called - apart from people being hungry, it would give the horses a rest.

After lunch, the last (and slowest, and steepest, and roughest) little way to another high and precarious and spectacular location, the best, by common consent, so far.

We began immediately to prepare to shoot the beginnings of the next day's material, a simple scene on this knoll approaching the point in the script where the packhorse is speared and lost down the cliff. Probably, on recent record, less than an hour to knock this over, then quite some hours could be spent preparing the next day.

Despite the fact that David Gulpilil was magnificent (it was his scene for the taking, and he sure took it) some four hours later we finally limped away from the "simple" scene. We had it, and it probably had more in it than I'd originally envisaged, but it was hard, hard work. Steadicam had seemed the obvious way to go for this scene, but if this territory is hard on horses, it is harder by far on steadicammers. The few dozen larger stones and boulders are easy enough to remove, but combine the thousands of smaller, rounder stones on hard ground with a fair sprinkling of the most vicious, spiny spinifex, and you get steadicam hell.

We survived hell intact, but it left a much shorter time to sort out the next day, which was really the scene that had perplexed me a little, what with rearing horses on clifftops, spears flying, guns firing and assorted general chaos. I must have been thinking about it a lot whilst enduring the difficulties of the previous scene (or maybe during the long drive out), because once on the spot with horse master, safety officer, first a.d. and director of photography (Bill, Grant, Karen and Jonesy), I had a clear and approved vision of how to do the scene, and none of it seemed so much trouble after all.

Add to that the bonus of knowing that the trip back for the horses on Wednesday will be faster than expected, and therefore will allow more comprehensive shooting, and all in all the day was very productive...and the rushes will certainly look spectacular.

We returned, tired, to our first rushes report, the material from, as far as I can work out, the first day

and a half (seems like months ago, but it was only last week). The report was glowing, both about the look and about the focus of the actors "...best first day's rushes I have seen" says the editor (and I expected, perhaps, there to be some qualification, but there wasn't any), and all crew and cast were very happy.

## **Tuesday, March 6, 2001**

Day six of the shoot, and a real feeling of being in the thick of things now. Another hour and a half to location to meet with those who had decided to camp out overnight (it's such a lovely location that a few of the crew stayed out with the horse wranglers, who stayed out with the horses).

Gary (Sweet, actor) just made it to the vehicles at departure time, as he'd had to get up even earlier than the rest of us to feed the horses left at base, a job that Bill had happily entrusted him with. As befits his character, Gary is a good rider, which is just as well as he spends most of this film on a horse.

Onto our mountain for the day, without the sound crew, who were still on the track quite some way back dealing with a flat tyre and various other rough terrain misadventures (I still haven't caught up with the details). So we started off with a simple POV (point of view) shot, which didn't require any sound and needed to be shot early anyway, before the ground became all scuffed up in the usual film crew way.

Then onto the main body of work, and within three shots the hairs were standing up on the back of my neck...it was hard to imagine a better feel in the images we were working to bring to the screen. The camera loves David (Gulpilil), and he was remembering to do things I hadn't thought of in the first place. Equally the camera seems to love Gary and Damon and Grant, the more so when they're on horseback in that landscape. It was exciting stuff, and there has increasingly been a pervading sense that "Hey! This film could really work, it really might be something special..." (we'll see).

Then a whole lot of handheld short shots as all hell breaks loose on the mountain top: the pack horse is speared. We had the works - rearing horses, gunfire, dust special effects. The crew worked relentlessly through the day, in conditions that weren't easy. Especially in the afternoon the wind came up very strongly, in powerful

gusts that caused more than one take to come to grief with an actor's hat flying down the mountainside.

Again the crew and cast worked at some sort of peak efficiency and commitment to the film. I had cause to reflect on its mixture...people I've worked with consistently, some I've worked with before, and some I'd never worked with...it felt like I'd been working with them all for a long time, even though some of them I barely knew.

I had special cause to reflect on the sound crew, who, as if to make up for previous unknown misdemeanours that day, seemed to pick every situation perfectly, when to record and when just to let camera shoot mute; also because none of us know whether this sequence is going to work (or look rather silly) until the sound work on it has been done in post-production, until all the elements of it are in place.

Jim (Currie) and Mike (Bakaloff) were the sound crew I worked with on my last film in the jungle of South America (we were missing only the redoubtable Duncan Thompson, who has the singular distinction of, when attempting to record various jaguar sounds, having his microphone windsock eaten by a female jaguar on heat...ask him about it). Now we were in the semi-desert in Australia, in a much better working environment, but the level of effort and enthusiasm was undiminished.

The day raced on. Jonesy was full of energy and had his camera crew running up and down the knoll. Damon got to fire his first gun on film, and was duly and correctly excited by it (as his character would have been, firing his first real shot in the line of duty). Shots involving gunfire were peculiar, apart from the earplugs and earmuffs worn by the crew. Instead of the rolling energy of the rest of the filming, there was a sudden stillness and discipline as each gun handover, each gun pointing, each cartridge check, each part of this process, was handled with the utmost discipline by Wayne (O'Donovan, the armourer and David Gulpilil's friend).

Finally to the last shot, one that from the beginning I hadn't expected to work. I'd wanted a big wide shot, from a distant ridge, of the action on top of the knoll and of the dust trail that remained after the pack horse had plunged to its doom. Grant had devised a sort of reverse pulley system, whereby a hessian bag of premixed (for colour) dust was pulled extremely quickly down the steep

incline. The shot would really begin when the bag left the bottom of frame.

The usual unsung culprits (such as Roberto and Mike and Owen) climbed down to man the rope, while from my view from the distant ridge, Gary seemed to be directing the action on top. With the battery on my walkie-talkie failing fast, we rolled camera and I called action. Down the bag flew, only to become firmly stuck in some bushes barely a tenth of the way into its trajectory. Someone (Wayne I think, by the colour of his shirt) climbed all the way up and untangled it.

Again I called for the camera to roll and called action, hoping the walkie-talkie hadn't failed me at this point. Nothing happened for a moment, and I was about to turn away in dismay, when suddenly there was a streak of something down the incline, and the steep face exploded into a lengthy plume of dust that then began to settle gracefully, perfectly.

It was a fitting end to a great day. Twenty-six setups in a remote and difficult location with difficult elements (horses, for a start, although these have been terrifically well-behaved since our little mishap on day one) and unkind weather. And somehow I could have the confidence that each of the setups would make a contribution to the film.

#### **Thursday, March 8, 2001**

Day eight, and a very different day's shooting than what we've become used to...leave at a civilised hour (8 am), to a location close to base (6 kms), with pleasant conditions (mainly sand underfoot rather than jagged rocks and prickly bushes, plenty of shade trees and a large waterhole). Shooting couldn't start until ten while the sun made up its mind to peer over the canyon wall, and all in all it was a very pleasant start to the day, a relief even.

On set today was Annie Browning, as representative of the completion guarantors (this is a sort of insurance company which guarantees completion of the film to the investors; they have wide ranging powers when things start to go wrong, including the ability to fire just about anybody, but normally they work co-operatively with the production in times of trouble).



Normally the c.g. representatives stand around and watch a lot, and get into lots of discussions with producery types, but Annie's art department background and our small but enthusiastic crew soon got the better of her, and there she was, indistinguishable from any of the rest of us, sweeping sand to eliminate unwanted footmarks, carrying water, assisting wardrobe - a useful extra crew member for the day.

First up was a scene where the Tracker spots a little group of aborigines ahead, and, though fearing the consequences, calling this to the Fanatic's attention. There was a complex range of emotions for David (Gulpilil) to play, and some changed dialogue because of the slightly changed extras situation (changing dialogue late in the piece can really throw actors for whom English is their second language, and English is about David's fifth language).

We rehearsed a little, found the way to go, and shot. With the able support of Gary and Damon, David was magnificent - shivers went down my spine and all I wanted to do in that moment was to get into the editing room and cut the scene. Jim (Currie, sound), was equally impressed by the intimacy of the scene, and had me listen back to some of the takes...it sounded as good as it had appeared to me when shooting.

A break was called as the small group of extras were still being readied for the POV shots, which were eventually fired off after a slight further delay after lunch.

Then onto the big massacre scene, to be shot over two afternoons for consistency of light. We first worked on the geography and placement of all the elements...a line of Aborigines in the middle, there the horses, there the tracker leaning against a tree, there the Philosopher watching, here the Fanatic, there the Follower.

I had decided to fragment the shooting of this scene, both for convenience and to reduce its impact on us, and first up we decided to shoot most of the tracker's material. That meant bringing out the chains, and the first uneasy moments came for extras and crew alike, as four of them were chained together round the neck as was the custom in those days.

The extras by now were no longer simply extras, but had names...another David, Susan (accidentally called Suzuki through a misunderstanding early on, a nickname that

stuck), Uncle Ross, Francis, Auntie Dot and Glennys. They stood patiently, chained in the most horrible way, and were a grim reminder about how we used to do things, even in my lifetime (in pre-production, when Beverley and I were sorting out where to source the neck chains, we spoke to a lovely older man, most kind and helpful, about neckchains. I'd read they were still being used in the 1940's, but he corrected me...he'd been a policeman in the desert in the mid-fifties, alone in a territory covering tens of thousands of square miles, and he'd frequently had no option, when called upon to bring in some Aboriginals for whatever reason, but to chain them together and then to his vehicle).

We filmed David, good again, then onto the Philosopher. By the time that shot was set the sun had moved on us, so we went on to the first part of the Follower. Just looking through the lens at the shot convinced me again how right Damon is for the part, both as an actor and for the look. I think we might have found an exceptionally good new talent here (and, as usual, very well trained by NIDA, the National Institute of Dramatic Arts).

During Damon's shot I also watched Gary (off screen, but working hard to support Damon's process), and had cause to reconsider how to cover his opening material. This would now be more complex, and, with the sun fast approaching the rim of the cliffs on the other side of the creek, a halt was called to the day's proceedings, again at a very civilised time.

### **Friday, March 9, 2001**

Hotter than it's been the last few days (more than 50 in the sun), and it sure felt it. Still in the creekbed, so at least some shade available, but both morning and afternoon were difficult, for different reasons, and the heat made both more so. The upcoming day off, Sunday, was a welcome thought at times.

Morning started with one of those easy scenes that rapidly turn into difficult, irritating-to-shoot scenes that threaten to make a mess of the schedule for the next few days. What on paper looked like a simple hour-and-a-half took all morning and took us back to our massacre site somewhat depleted of energy and with the biggest part of the day still ahead of us.

It's often hard to know exactly what causes these things. Perhaps it was me wanting too much from the scene.

Perhaps the more of them we do, the less satisfied we're getting with the way we're covering all these moving scenes, and we're (I'm) looking to be more inventive (equals a greater degree of difficulty equals more time taken). Perhaps the scene had just been underestimated. Or perhaps it was a simple thing that started it, something like Chris (unit) had had to do a run into Leigh Creek, Owen (unit) had had to take an extra back after the first shot and just when the crew and cast began to need it, there was no one to automatically make sure that everyone was drinking enough water in conditions that were suddenly and earlier hotter than expected.

Still, we shot what was required, a little scrappily probably, but there seemed to me to be enough material to eventually cut a decent scene.

Arriving at the massacre site so much later, we decided to drop the charge until the following morning (a better light match) and get straight into the business end of the day. Uncle Ross, Auntie Dot, David, Suzuki, Francis and Glennys were duly chained together for the afternoon and we began.

Gary's first shot was awesome...he ranted and raved and railed at the chained Aboriginals like a true fanatic, powerful yet subtle, frightening whether or not you know that the real man is so far removed from the man he is portraying. His voice echoed around the canyon, and despite the fact that a song is meant to be playing over this sequence, I felt certain that the combination of sounds would be a better option, seeing that we were getting such exceptional material.

I put it down to a consequence of the difficult morning that unfortunately I'm unlikely to have quite the options I thought I'd have...a breakdown of communication with the sound department meant that they'd been completely unprepared for what actually happened, and although they'd managed to get the essence of Gary's rantings, they'd been unable to catch it the way we'd all heard it (ringing through the canyon). These kind of problems arise from a number of different areas: in the first instance we tend not to rehearse this sort of stuff, because there's a spontaneity of performance possible that way; secondly, we were shooting hand-held, meaning we're using the very noisy camera instead of the fairly noisy camera, meaning the sound department has few options to begin with.

Being so far behind on the day, doing it again was not a good option. On we went, and this time it was the Follower's turn, meek and mild and naïve, becoming an ogre by the end of his shot. Equally good as Gary, equally terrible.

We shot until the light told us we could shoot no longer. Most of the scene is in the can, perhaps four more shots to complete, plus the charge leading up to it. After that we can start on tomorrow's work.

The extras were as good as they get...patient, stoic and uncomplaining despite the discomfort of heat and neckchain, and perfect in shot. There was a fair degree of fussing over them and joking in order to take the tenseness out of the situation.

Most, if not all, of the crew and cast (except David Gulpilil) felt something of what it may have been like in those days, and how easily any one of us may have been involved, and how little understanding we really have of the Aboriginal way of being. What we're taught at school is a joke, a sad parody of whatever the reality was or might be.

I think the extras themselves understood what they were doing better than any of us could have explained it to them...they stood, captive in chains, and simply maintained their dignity through anything we could throw at them, any abuse we could visit upon them. David was the only one among us who was actually excited by the scene, by the nature of the depiction. In his home country in Arnhem Land there are still people alive who were present at the massacres that took place there in the first half of the twentieth century, and for him to be seeing how some of it might have been was for him being in touch with his history. But it is our history too.

On the way back I was in the vehicle with the actors. I thought about the strength of some of the images we'd just put down, and their place in the film, the balance of the film. And I suddenly remembered a moment from one of this morning's shots, where, having seen a black figure darting through the bush, the Tracker turns to the Fanatic and announces that there are blacks about, and then breaks into a wide grin, indicating "You fellas are in trouble".

It had not been specifically planned, though in general we'd talked about finding moments like this. It had come

from David's heart and understanding. The recollection of that grin assuaged my concern about balance...there is joy in this film, there is beauty in it, and ultimately it is hopeful.

**Saturday, March 10, 2001**

I looked again at the list of what was now scheduled to be shot today, day ten, as I arrived on location: the remaining two shots from the scene where the Tracker spies the small group of blacks (fairly simple); the whole of the charge (another six shots, but horses cantering down the creekbed, constant repositioning, constant hazard); the remainder of the massacre scene (at least eight shots including two time-consuming gunshots); our biggest dialogue scene so far (of the aftermath, in which the nuances and complexity of the performances are paramount and likely to take some time to find); a short scene preparatory to stringing up the corpses; a short scene of the tracking party departing.

We'd be unable to begin until after 10, by which time the sun would have crested the canyon wall on one side. We'd have to complete by 5, by which time the sun would have slipped below the canyon wall on the other side. It was an almost impossible task, and I resigned myself to being half a day behind by the end of the day.

This created some other problems to think about. If we didn't finish with our extras today, they'd have to be housed and fed for an additional two days, paid for another day, and the already squeezed budget would be damaged further, compromising something else further down the track. But if I went ahead and shot only those shots involving the extras to clear them by the end of the day, we'd end up with an impossibly fragmented bunch of scenes to complete, quite clearly compromising the material we were shooting now.

I discussed it with Karen (first A.D.), and found her less pessimistic, although quite aware that we were up against it. We decided just to begin shooting and see how the day developed.

Well the day developed early. Before we could even do the first shot, we ground to a substantial halt. Preparatory to the first charge shot, the wranglers were patiently working with the horses and actors, getting the horses used to the path they'd have to travel, getting the actors used to the increasing speed (a canter was considered maximum safe, so no out-and-out galloping), gradually introducing elements such as the riders using one hand to hold a gun.

It was a great sight, seeing the horses go back and forth, the increasing confidence in the particular

conditions of both man and horse. It was not such a great sight when Grant's horse stumbled, dipped and veered sharply. The laws of momentum ensured that Grant did not change direction in the same way that the horse did. Instead, the Philosopher went flying through the air, hat and all, and came crashing down, again with the laws of physics demanding that he land on about the only hard bit of ground in the entire creekbed.

I saw the entire incident in slow motion: while Grant was still going upwards, I knew he was in for it, and I was most concerned for his physical well-being; that feeling stayed with me through to the end, but by the time he'd levelled off I knew the day's schedule was definitely out the window; as he travelled downwards towards a certain hard landing, I knew the entire schedule for the film was in serious jeopardy; by the time the dust had settled and Grant lay unmoving, I was rewriting the script in my head.

As Airlie (unit nurse, also helping out with camera and continuity) and other designated people began to tend to Grant, I turned and put further distance between the inert Philosopher and myself. I don't want to know in situations like that, particularly when you turn and look a few minutes later and still the body doesn't move.

Then I heard a laugh that was unmistakably Grant's. He's a wily old fox...after the shock of a landing as hard as that you never immediately know what might be broken or damaged, and he lay there patiently as Airlie checked him out before giving him permission to move. He was bruised, scraped, scratched and shaken, but nothing broken, nothing serious.

A hasty conference...Grant would be taken back to Arkaroola Village for further medical investigation, Bill (horse master) would double for him in the charge, and then we'd see. The Philosopher costume double had been pirated for the extras in that previous change of plan, so Grant had the further indignity of having his clothes taken off him before he left location.

And so, eventually, we turned back to the task at hand, shooting the day's work, the unlikely having by now been turned into the virtually impossible.

We shot the charge, well and easily except for one shot, during which a persistent focus problem turned out to be a slipping focus ring.

We shot the end of the discovery scene, and by the time we'd completed that it was almost lunchtime and Grant was back on set, hobbling, but in good spirits.

Rather than take lunch immediately, I decided to drop the trickiest bits (the gunfiring) of what remained of the massacre scene and try and complete that before the break.

I felt no compromise in doing this, it simply made the build-up to its end different, not worse. We broke for lunch having achieved more than I'd expected.

During lunch the sound crew and armourer recorded the gunfire, so as not to hold up proceedings later in the afternoon. I sat nearby, earplugs in, and considered the substantial dialogue scene, and how to most easily cover it to best effect.

By the time lunch was over I had a comprehensive plan, diagrams of actor and camera positions and a shot list in rough order of shoot. The actors came up first to block the scene. I explained that circumstances were such that I'd prefer to dictate the way the scene would move and be shot, rather than working with them on all the possibilities and allowing movement and coverage to develop organically from the material. All were comfortable with that, especially Gary, whose scene this mostly is (it shifts to the Tracker and the Follower at the end).

Quite quickly we found ourselves shooting. The simple coverage was in fact giving the actors certain freedoms, and the performances began to crackle. Grant first, and almost as if his injury had given him a certain (appropriate) world-weariness. David, mesmerising as usual, then funny. Damon, in shock, hiding himself, then forced to reveal the extent of his anguish. Then Gary, and all the shades his performance in this scene would require.

After a particular take of Gary I looked over to Jim (sound recordist, connoisseur of fine wine and fine performance) and got the unqualified double thumbs-up. The scene was going down, and going down well.

We shot the second last scene, then were set up to shoot the last scene with time to spare. One take, a slight adjustment, then a second take, better than the first.



Somehow, somehow we'd managed to get the day in. As I write this I still can't quite understand it. Every single person contributed towards it, each of them ought to be mentioned, which would make it something like a long speech at an awards ceremony.

But each film shoot has, for me, an engine room, a certain section of the crew that actually drives it forward on set, with all others helping that without much being able to make it go faster. Different films have different engine rooms; some (like the last film I shot) have none at all. This film clearly has a very efficient engine room.

I suspect the engine room on "The Tracker" is the triumvirate of Jonesy, Mike (grip) and Roberto (gaffer). Sometimes I think it's just Jonesy himself.

### **Monday, March 12, 2001**

Day eleven, and a day unlike any we've had.

First up, it was cool...so much so that the unusual sight of people wearing jackets was the thing that struck one going down to breakfast.

Secondly (and ironically, considering the weather), today was the day we were going to be spending in the Arkaroola swimming pool, shooting the underwater parts of the scene where the Tracker pulls the Fanatic off his horse and down into the waterhole, nearly drowning both of them in the process.

A lot of preparation still needed to be done. A busload of German geology students (Arkaroola is world-renowned as a geologist's paradise) were here at the weekend, and the pool was in heavy use, preventing any setting up prior to the day.

Blacks were draped around the walls of a corner of the deep end, camouflage nets were judiciously placed, water weed and rocks brought up from the creekbed and the waterhole, sunken logs had to be placed, the underwater camera housing had to be tested underwater and so it went.

By lunch we were close to doing the first shot, but the safety officer and unit were still down at the real waterhole, siphoning extra water into it from another waterhole for tomorrow's shoot. Meantime the preparation

time had given me the chance to storyboard the entire sequence (a task I'd meant to do yesterday, on our day off, but for which I hadn't had the time, dealing as I had to with more immediate issues than a shoot a day away).

So we began seriously after lunch with ten shots to get, each of them probably no longer than three or four seconds in the film, hence an expected total of thirty or so seconds of screentime for the day (this is very fiddly sort of shooting).

First David as the Tracker plunged into the pool, Gary watching. Another take necessary. Some minutes are required to reset, and David, who carries not an ounce of extra weight on his entire frame, was shivering by the time we were close to doing the second take. Gary looked less comfortable about the afternoon.

In David went a second time, then eventually a third by the time we had all the technical details worked out and could get it right.

Then Gary's turn, and he benefitted by David's being the guinea pig...one take and he was drying off. Some trials of the next shot, involving the two of them, using Grant and Wayne as the underwater talent (these two, along with Jonesy and Mike the grip, spent many hours in the water), then back into the water for David and Gary.

Mostly things went well, and David and Gary were both patient and terrific. David had to be sent off for a hot shower part of the way through proceedings, otherwise we might have been shooting without him the next day. But back he came, straight into the water, soldiering on.

Gary's last shot was also a testament to his determination to get this film right. There he was, the end of the Tracker's neckchain tangling his hand to his throat to an underwater snag, upside down under water with a breathing apparatus waiting for the frame to be set. When it was, he got rid of the breathing apparatus with his one free hand, and proceeded not only to act, but to act well and for a sustained period of time, such that instead of the expected five seconds of screentime from the shot, we can probably well do with fifteen or twenty seconds of it.

Although ultimately their characters are (literally) mortal enemies in the film, Gary and David are mates on and off set, and it's great to see them end a difficult

day like this, dripping wet, by giving each other a big hug, the looks on their faces saying to each other, "Well done, fellow actor, thank you for supporting me."

And tomorrow we brave the waterhole itself.

## **Tuesday, March 13, 2001**

The real waterhole today, the big stunt day, with two characters, chained together, ending up in the drink from a cliff 6 metres above. An impossible day, since half a day from the schedule was lost preparing for the swimming pool and an already difficult day and a half has now been crammed into a single day.

Things started well enough when Jonesy found a way down for the vehicles, into the creekbed just above the waterhole, saving us close to half a kilometre of gear lugging in each direction. Meanwhile Owen led a team which was trying to pump water from a higher pool into the hero waterhole, to raise the level for extra safety for the stunts to come.

Delays were expected because of the gear carting and water pumping, but by the time the sun had broken above the high ridge directly to the east of us, the upstream pool was all but empty and we were set to shoot.

And the morning's shooting went simply marvellously, all sections working well together...the horses in their new titanium-impregnated shoes, the wranglers, the actors, camera, sound, costume...everything seemed to come together for an incredibly efficient morning's shoot. Even the weather helped...bright and sunny, little wind, and significantly cooler than we'd experienced. I went to lunch a happy man, thinking that there were indeed possibilities that we may get the day in.

After lunch it was a different story. A big wide shot took longer than it should have (yes, we had to climb with camera onto the opposite ridge, and yes, everyone and almost everything was in shot and had to move or be moved, but it still took longer than it should have...I don't know what was going on down there).

Then the two big stunt shots, two cameras on each (we only have two cameras), took, I suppose, as long as they should have, because in both, everything has to be very carefully worked out beforehand, both for safety and for camera.

The first had Owen doubling for David as he plunged into the pool below, the second had Zed, a stuntman, doubling for Gary as he is pulled face-down down the dry waterfall. Both seemed to go very well, but by the time they were done we were deep into the afternoon.

After a couple of quick POV shots it became obvious to me that the light down in the waterhole was changing so quickly (the shadow of the cliff was starting to move onto the water) that there was no way to finish the day and that we'd better stop that stuff now before we compromised its quality (no point to that when we were going to be coming back anyway).

We still had a substantial dialogue scene to shoot at the top, and I was just thinking about that when another problem struck me...we'd painted ourselves into a corner in terms of script logic with the location we'd chosen and how we'd shot everything so far. The only logical exit was the path the Tracker took before he "fell" in (he was, after all, supposed to be following the path the Fugitive took). He'd taken that path because it was the only safe spot from which to launch the stunt. It was also about the only path where the horses could absolutely not get out (although it doesn't look like that).

The scene would have to be shot somewhere else (don't know where yet). So a quick change of plan - we'd pack up here and head back to base, from where we could shoot a late afternoon scene (a one shot scene of the reduced party climbing a ridge in quite big country) that had been floating backwards and forwards in the schedule. It'd be good to get rid of it.

So back we went, and with still an hour before ideal light, I had time to show Jonesy and Karen two of the missing locations I'd found at the weekend. A day's shoot had been planned for these, but I figured with some smart thinking, we might get away with half a day, do that in the afternoon tomorrow after first finishing the waterhole.

It seemed that this could very well work, so back we came, fired off the shot and called wrap. All in all a highly satisfactory day, despite losing some time. Twenty-two setups, two locations, two stunts, horses, water, clifftops, not bad at all.

**Wednesday, March 14, 2001**

Day thirteen and back to the waterhole, to finish off the unfinished. Looking again, carefully, at the script overnight, I realised there was more to be done there than at first I'd thought, and any ideas of completing that scene plus a whole day's work rather receded from mind.

The lighting match at the waterhole, however, came about more quickly than expected, a quirk of the sun's trajectory, the precise topography and the fact that we started by shooting down by the water instead of above it. Despite the cool morning and the cold water, David and Gary immersed themselves both physically and mentally with gusto, and we were soon at the point where the Fanatic drags the Tracker out of the water and abuses him.

Couple of problems here: time (or lack thereof); and the steep and muddy slope that was the only way out of the water. Gary and I discussed the possibilities, which were unpredictable. David volunteered that Gary should just do what he had to do, not to worry about his (David's) physical or mental sensibilities. We set a shot that could deal with just about any situation (that is, fairly wide).

Well, two marvellous takes later and the whole of the rest of the scene was done. Gary at one stage literally picked David up and threw him on the bank in anger. David played the pretend-drowning Tracker to perfection. No further coverage seemed necessary...you wouldn't want to cut into performances such as those.

By now the sun was high enough for us to pick up a couple of earlier shots from above the waterhole. Filming was completed probably two hours earlier than just about anyone had expected, and we now had a real chance at the day.

A good suggestion from Damon about some extra sound from him meant we left him with the sound crew as we packed up and hightailed it to the next location, about ten kilometres away. No traffic, but rough roads, you can't have it all. We managed, as I'd hoped, to get the first shot there, a steadicam POV, in the can before lunch.

By now it was hot again, and we were in open, unforgiving country. That, combined with horses and chains and

steadicam made the initial period after lunch a bit of a struggle. I dropped a planned shot in order to get us out of there to our next location with enough time left to do a substantial scene, where the Fanatic's horse is speared and the Fanatic is thrown.

Again a steadicam POV to begin (by now we've learnt that these should be done first, before we've trampled the ground and completely wrecked any possibility of getting a shot that doesn't have "a film crew was here" stamped all over it), then the Fanatic's point of view of his horse galloping away, spear stuck in its side. David had spent lunch time making the spear, Bill had spent the morning making the rig to hold it.

This was tricky business, because we were going to try and do it unrehearsed, to preserve the look of the ground, a wide, mud-baked and cracked creekbed. The hero horse was placed next to the camera, whilst in the distance the wranglers paraded the other horses back and forth, then into the bush, back and forth, then into the bush. The hero horse soon became very edgy, being very keen to join his friends at the other end of the creekbed.

Camera and sound rolled, action was called, and the horse galloped off beautifully. But it was smarter than we were. Even though this was its first time at this location, it knew where the road (track) was, and it knew the going was easier there. Off it veered sharply to the right, out of shot, across some open land, onto the road and to the other horses.

Take two. A human chain is organised, just out of shot, to block the horse's path to the road. Again action, and this time the horse, having half-done it once before, galloped off even more keenly, right down the centre of the creekbed, the spear sticking out beautifully.

One major event left, and that was the horse rear and the Fanatic's fall. Gary padded up (he was to do the stunt himself - his years on "Police Rescue" have made him quite an expert, he's also a good rider and knows the horse), last minute check for rocks on the softer dried mud/sand surface of the creekbed. A couple of careful test rears, no problem, Gary's in control of his horse.

The camera rolls, the horse with Gary on board walks and rears and...Gary sort of stays on for a bit, then launches himself onto the ground. Workable, but it didn't look as convincing as it might (Gary told me afterwards

that his only problem had been that it just wasn't "natural", falling off a horse), and some bright blue elbow protectors had been revealed as his sleeves were pushed up during the shot.

A second take, with an added instruction...if the fall goes well enough, and if the horse takes off, then it'd be great if Gary could continue the shot and go for his rifle, which would, by then, be lying on the ground.

Up went the horse, down went the Fanatic in a cloud of dust, off went the horse, across went the Fanatic for his rifle, up went the rifle, pointed here, there, where did that spear come from? It was terrific, and it made shooting the rest of the scene so much easier that we finished the day with enough time to do a wild track of the horse running off (for sound). Again the human chain, and again the horse performed perfectly...it was a good end to an exceptionally good day.

#### **Thursday, March 15, 2001**

Day fourteen was the first of two days in a new area of locations, which will include our longest dialogue scene so far plus a substantial walk-in (always difficult simply because of the physical toll on people lugging equipment long distances before shooting even begins, and the difficulty of providing even basic amenities, like water, let alone coffee or tea or food).

A lot of indecision (by me) as to what we should do on which of the two days...I'd eventually decided to start with the dialogue scene so as to make sure it did not get compromised by lack of time. I'd half-feared this scene. One is never quite sure whether the words themselves will work when spoken by the actors, and it's often very tricky shooting a long scene outside when the light varies as much as it does over the course of a day. Matching it shot to shot can become a nightmare.

We arrived at the first location, a large waterhole in a wide creekbed, to find that the level of it had dropped very substantially since I'd seen it last some weeks ago. The edges were very boggy as a result and there was no way the horses could come right up to it (they were edgy even coming near). More prevarication...what sort of wide shot? Where now to stage the action? For the first time that I can remember on this shoot, Jonesy and I were talking at cross-purposes.

If the very start of the day was inauspicious, the main part of the morning made up for it. While the camera was being prepped, I rehearsed with the actors away from set (again the problem of destroying the surface of the ground before we've shot it). The scene began to flow.

Shooting was very straightforward, and very smooth. The actors were nailing their parts, the crew working very efficiently. By ten o'clock we could afford to call a tea break, by eleven thirty the scene was done.

Not possible to shoot anything else before lunch, and lunches had not yet arrived, so we surveyed locations for some of the remaining work in this area (only Chris and I had ever been here). We decided to shoot one shot of one of tomorrow's scenes first up after lunch, as Murray (the extra involved) would be arriving with the lunches and that way we could clear him. The horse wranglers were consulted about the area for two scenes and they began investigating those.

After lunch we knocked off the shot with Murray (looking very regal and traditional on a distant and high rocky outcrop) and began the main afternoon scene, wherein the Tracker starts to sow the seeds of doubt in the tracking party. The area was spooky in feel...surface was small quartz stones on fairly flat ground, with scrubby casuarinas surrounding. The take of the main walking shot was fantastic for a sound quality we hadn't heard before.

It was, by now, getting quite hot. At one point the gate check (wherein the small camera aperture that lets in the image is checked for cleanliness) had to be delayed because the small metal torch employed had been sitting in the sun and was too hot for Dunkles to handle. We pushed through the scene and completed it in good time, then again were left with an hour or so until the next shot could be done (the sun was still too high to match the areas in the script where these would go).

Then good news and bad news from the horse wranglers... they'd found somewhere for a steep climb, but the selected spot for the main walk down into the waterhole scene was an absolute no go. The best they could do would not achieve the intention of the scene.

At times like this it is always best to go straight back to the script (something I often forget to do). A bit of reading, a bit of analysing, some wandering round and suddenly I saw something...the complete opposite angle to how we had shot the waterhole in the morning now looked



terrific and workable (the sun had shifted and changed the whole feel of the place).

A yell over to where the crew were patiently waiting in the shade - all galvanised into action and within fifteen minutes that problem had been solved.

Then a scramble onto opposite hills for camera and cast with horses for the steep climb, and right on schedule we finished the day, having achieved more than certainly I'd expected, and having made the next day, with the long walk-in scene, that much more achievable. Just as well, tomorrow promises to be very hot, with storms forecast for the afternoon. We'll see...

### **Friday, March 16, 2001**

Onto the High Ridge Track with the camera crew at sunrise, the rest of the crew way down below preparing for one of the "big" shots in the film. There they were, mere specks to the eye but rather better seen through a 500mm lens.

Not long and all is in readiness: turn over and action, the horses walk, the zoom out starts. Suddenly it looks like a dozen special effects experts have gone mad down there...a dust storm blows up right on cue (does it look real? I don't know yet), causing the actors on the valley floor to abort their mission (a hat blew off), but that making no difference to the shot, because by then we're too wide to see any people, let alone hats.

Another take, then off we set to join the others for the walk-in to the little canyon called American Gap. By the time we reached base camp the horses (and almost all the equipment) were in. The walk-in was obviously not quite the problem we thought it might be.

It was a little early to start shooting, not enough sun in the canyon yet, so we began by rehearsing, first the horses' walk, then with actors, then with dialogue. All was ready by the time the light was right and we began, quietly enough.

A few clouds began to appear, and became somewhat annoying by spacing themselves such that there never seemed quite enough time to get in a complete take. The wind started to blow, occasionally howling through the canyon, and darker clouds began to be seen. By the time we were at the end of our second shot conditions had

deteriorated - a lot of wind, heavy cloud with the occasional burst of sunlight, the odd rumble of thunder in the distance.

An up-to-date local weather forecast was radioed for, and we were assured that it would rain (it certainly looked as if it would). Mike Smith had climbed up the canyon wall to the mountain top and radioed that he couldn't see any relief in sight. Creekbed in narrow canyon, possible heavy rain nearby, likely rain here...it didn't take much imagination to work out that we should probably walk back out and return to Arkaroola base to work out what to do.

So back out we walked, all lugging, into the vehicles and off, with a one o'clock meeting scheduled to discuss our schedule. The rain came when we were part of the way back and looked as if it was setting in for the day.

We'd effectively lost a day in the schedule, and I wanted to go back to the canyon and get that scene. I thought about what was coming up in the future, and also how to use the rain rather than be running from it. Difficult, because various scenes deeper in the film had already been shot in fine weather, and there are risks involved in being out there when it's coming down.

Just prior to the meeting I'd worked out something of a solution for myself. A day further in the schedule was dedicated to a motion control shot (motion control is a computerised, roboticised, camera-movement system, very exotic and fairly cumbersome but occasionally very attractive to use to get particular visual effects).

The mocon shot, intended to compress the passing of a day, was very high risk, being very weather-dependent for a sustained period of time (in this case eight continuous hours of filming because of the time lapse aspects). If I could find a way to replace this by using the rain, then we'd have solved a number of problems simultaneously...how to use the afternoon, saving a day later in the schedule to go back and complete today's shooting, plus we'd save some money in the budget at the same time. (These things are never, of course, so simple...cancellation of the mocon suddenly meant a large amount of extra work for Julie and Celia, to undo what had meant a large amount of work for them organising it in the first place.)

The new idea came from the image of rain on the Follower's face, and was simple (though beyond me to describe it adequately here). I explained it at the

meeting, during which the crew was also asked if they minded having the next day (Saturday) off and work the Sunday instead, seeing that the following weekend we are to have two days off. This was to give the weather a chance to settle.

Everything thus decided, we went out to shoot Damon in the rain, Gary under cloud, Grant under the hot sun and David in the golden sun. The rain, of course, immediately stopped, but we did manage to get the other three, and will wait for whatever rain we may get later to film Damon. If there is none, so much the better for the rest of the shoot, and out with the hoses on the last day of the schedule. Today, meanwhile, had been a day salvaged.

### **Sunday, March 18, 2001**

Saturday was, of course, a completely fine and cloudless day, perfect for shooting apart from a stiff breeze. Luckily for the call made Friday, so was Sunday, and we headed off into a new location area thinking it was Monday.

First up was Bolla Bollana waterhole, distinguished by a steep cliff face on one side and green-fringed permanent water...a sort of oasis in all the stone.

The wide shot of the approach out of the way, we settled comfortably into the scene. Next shot was one of the horses drinking, and this they did right on cue and with great gusto. After all the anonymous walking shots we've done with them, finally something to give them at least a semblance of personality (which, off screen, they have plenty of).

The sun-guns (portable battery-powered lights) came out for the first time for the three-shot of those on horses, but by the time we were ready to shoot, the sun was poking over the edge of the cliff-face and they weren't needed. Both takes oddly pleased me in the performance, then we turned around in the other direction to shoot David.

He was so lovely (having invented some business which really added to his performance) that I added a couple of shots here...the scene clearly became his.

Then a location shift, to a place which, since Friday afternoon's survey with Jim Willoughby (who has taken over the horses from brother Bill) has been called The

Cricket Ground, because it is the largest piece of flat land that anyone has seen at Arkaroola. The thought of playing cricket on it is, of course, ludicrous, because it is covered with millions of jagged white stones.

Our problem here was one of both light and of ground preservation. Jonesy and I managed to stall shooting until after lunch for the light, but we still had to shoot the shots of this fairly complex scene completely out of sequence, in order to get those which relied on pristine ground done first (only a bulldozer or a working film crew churns ground up faster than rehearsals with horses).

So this was very unsatisfying shooting, pulling individual shots from a larger sequence out of their emotional and physical place. It's unpleasant for the actors, who can get no flow going, and it's unpleasant for me, who constantly has to tell the actors precisely where to move or what to do, before the actual context for these actions has been firmly established.

We struggled through and at least got the terrain-dependent shots done. There was clearly insufficient time to complete the whole scene, so we called a halt at that point - we'd be back in the area tomorrow, and there was probably a way of fitting in the rest of the scene at a similar time of the day.

So we packed up and raced off to try and pick up one of tomorrow's one-shot scenes today. No go, we'd have to wait at least three hours for the light to be right (the shot is intended to have the actors and horses climbing up a ridge in silhouette). That would take us well past finishing time, so better left until tomorrow when we have a later start and will be shooting another scene nearby until late anyway.

An early mark for the crew and cast, deserved because it is, after all, Sunday, and not the Monday it really feels like.

### **Monday, March 19, 2001**

Sometimes it's difficult to remember at the end of a day what happened at the beginning of it. Today was such a day, with three quite separate, equally intense periods of shooting that were all quite different in both nature and terrain.

First up were the two scenes that were the lead-up and the aftermath to the fight in the waterhole...half way up a little treed hillock, just across from where the horse camp has been set up for four days while we shoot in this area.

A later start than we've become used to, breakfast at a civilised hour, still out of synch with the days ("Is it really only Monday?").

The first of the two scenes required some detail and played in an axis where a number of shots were required, a few more than I would have liked, considering the schedule for the day. Shooting went well, the material felt very good, but approaching the second scene, time pressure was upon us. We blocked the scene (ran the action to see what the movement was and therefore how to cover it) and I felt we were slipping into a black hole - the action was awkward, and would be difficult to match in coverage, the scene would not play in a wide shot and we were beginning to leave too much evidence of our presence there to play it that way anyway, the horses were cramped, and to satisfactorily accumulate the scene in bits and pieces would take almost the rest of the day.

I was just starting to think that radical solutions were called for, but unable, sinking into that hole, to think of any, when Jonesy suggested we take the camera further back, to go wider still. At that moment I was looking at the Fanatic, and at that moment everything clicked into place: yes, we'd move the camera back, but to go longer, not wider, to focus in absolutely on the Fanatic and his response to what just happened and was happening around him.

A quick lens change, some focus measurements and we were shooting, one shot for the scene. Around him the action unfolded with its usual awkwardness, but as the Fanatic, Gary himself was focussed, intimidating, unpredictable - sound did the rest. Right on cue, in the middle of the second take, a gentle wind blew up, crying softly through the casuarinas...horses' hooves, the clanking of chains and dialogue did the rest. It was breathtaking.

A rapid move to the next location about three kilometres away, the cricket ground of yesterday's unfinished scene.

Shooting here was much easier now we didn't have to consider where we took each step, and quite quickly the camera was rolling. Serious performance stuff from the

Follower, then the Fanatic, and suddenly the first half of the scene was complete, and feeling very good.

Then the Tracker and the Follower, both separately and together, intense stuff, David and Damon playing their first serious scene together, a turning point for Damon's character. His transition from cynical sceptic to understanding was wonderful, David's satisfaction at having turned him equally so. Somehow, twice in a row, all the elements had come together...crew, cast, script, horses, weather, location...and it was exhilarating.

Lunch, well into the afternoon because of the late start, then onto the next location, near the top of a ridge with great views in all directions. Great plans (six crew carrying a board on which the steadicammer stands), a somewhat difficult carry-in of the gear, again a very awkward work space because of the rocks and the restricted area up top.

Careful rehearsals with the board...first with no one on (rocks to be cleared from their path), then with a person standing on top, then with Dunkles on top with steadicam. All this moving location, carrying in, preparing and rehearsing took significant time, but the landscape around only began to look better with the descending sun.

Then actors and horses in and suddenly, at the first rehearsal, everything fell apart. With the 35mm lens, all that needed to be seen could be seen, but far too much that shouldn't be seen, was. A longer lens would solve the issue of what shouldn't be seen, but would create problems with what should be seen.

A hasty rethink, a splitting of the shot into two quite different components, rehearse the six carriers again, try again with the camera, seems okay, let's do a take. Everything messy...by now the sun was so low that there was uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) lens flare, the actors had difficulty in timing their dialogue and action, the route the horses took was beginning to look like a permanent path and I was beginning to have grave fears that even if we did manage to shoot the scene like this, we'd have something unusable at the end, irrespective of how good the location was.

A quick decision to abandon the steadicam and go simple, on tripod. A hasty trip down (and up again) the hill for four people to bring back legs, head, other camera, mags and lens, because now we were really fighting time. Three shots planned and executed in quick time, suddenly things

working that hadn't worked before, in the end really quite a satisfactory scene.

Then one more scene, even though we might have only twenty minutes of sun left. A hasty evacuation with gear from the top of the hill, camera down the other side at the bottom, horses and actors halfway along the ridge, silhouetted against the sky with just a little low sun hitting them from three quarters behind. Quick, positions, sun's nearly gone, the Philosopher further back, he's been speared and can't keep up, roll camera, action, and there it was, the shot we'd intended in the can with probably less than two minutes to spare, everybody dog-tired but with the satisfaction of seeing the entire day achieved, and achieved marvellously well.

### **Tuesday, March 20, 2001**

The start to each day is usually peaceful...one wanders down to breakfast, chooses what to eat, a few muted good mornings, into the vehicles and off we go. Not so this morning...unexpected people to see, negotiations to be had, phone calls still being made as the first vehicles were leaving, grab something to eat and arrive late, move the assembled crew half a kilometre, only then some time to breathe.

Then too much time to breathe as preparations for the first shot seem to take an inordinately long time. It's the day when the Philosopher is speared, we need appropriate lead-up material, can't just spear him out of nowhere. Three modes of steadicam in the first four shots (low mode, high mode and horse-cam) doesn't help the flow of what we're doing, and a pattern is set for the day...small bits of furious activity, lengthy delays in between.

Weather conditions are variable. Cloud is building up but mostly it doesn't bother us too much. Just before lunch we're ready to shoot the spear flying through the air and we've achieved a little more than I thought we would.

None of the spears we have will fly properly through the air. We're finally in a situation where the minimal infrastructure we're working with is affecting our gathering of images. Everyone in pre-production had a little (or a lot) too much to do, and it was easy to leave the spear issue until later, during the shoot, we'll do this, we'll do that...neither this nor that were done, because during the shoot everyone is generally even

busier than during pre. So no spears would fly, despite the fact that we had an expert thrower to make them do so. Chalk that one up to a second unit pick up (what am I saying...we have no second unit, this main unit is already smaller than some second units).

So on to the spearing of the Philosopher after lunch. More fiddling with spears, this time in a rig on Grant's side. Wayne had spent the morning carving a spear which at least looked right, so we cut the head off (where most of the carving had taken place) and adapted that. Finally we had something that appeared to work, and finally we had a short burst of filming that seemed truly productive and good, wherein Grant not only had to fall off his horse at a precisely pre-determined spot with a spear sticking into his side, but had to do some serious acting at the same time.

He was wonderful - the handful of crew and cast who could be spectators reported afterwards that their group had collectively held their breaths as they were captured by his performance.

By now conditions were heavily overcast, but at least the light was consistent (though not at its best). We were sufficiently behind for my wish-list of shots to have become irrelevant, and increasingly I began to adapt the scene to a more achievable level, attempting whilst doing so, of course, to maintain the quality of the drama and performance.

More awkwardness...the ground of the main axis of action was by now so cut up that we had to shift, which meant either a time jump in the script that wasn't there (and would, in this case, require an extra shot) or a cheat that felt dubious. I covered myself with the option of the first if the second preferable option didn't work.

Then a series of technical mishaps delayed things further: the radio-controlled focus on the steadicam started randomly repositioning itself during the shot; there was a mag-jam in the middle of the best take of the Philosopher staggering after the others (who haven't noticed he's fallen off his horse); and some other problem I've already forgotten.

We scrambled thus through the day. We achieved enough if tomorrow doesn't go too badly, but will have some slightly more serious problems if we don't get at least a couple of hours of cloud in which to finish this scene.



**Wednesday, March 21, 2001**

A couple of hours of cloud we did not get today, so major decisions started early. Reshoot some of the scene to be completed in the sun? Return at a later date? That option was not so simple, because we had the horses to think about - they were camped a few kilometres away, but once we left this area of locations, it would be a substantial task (and substantial time) to get them back.

Hedging my bets I decided to shoot the following scenes first, in the sun (easy to get away with because there's both a time jump and a painting in between) then see if any of the promised cloud looked like arriving.

So with one eye on the action and the other on the few low-to-the-horizon wisps of cloud that were in evidence, we began shooting. First up a magnificent shot of David against an epic background such that Matt (recent arrival Matt Nettheim, stills photographer) saw fit to shoot an entire roll on the one shot.

Then a number of bitty scenes, all of which seemed to go very well. By lunchtime we were done, with a number of little highlights in the can (the feeling on set so different to the scrambling of yesterday), and not a cloud in the sky. I felt better about a major location move and a meaty new scene than I did about reshooting, as did the actors, so lunch it was, then the move. The wranglers went on ahead, before having lunch, their job being by far the most time-consuming.

During lunch worked out the new scene, where the Follower challenges the Fanatic about leaving the Philosopher behind, then arrived at the new location to find the horses already there. This gave us a flying start into the new scene, and we shot the afternoon away, more little highlights, not quite managing an entire day's work in the afternoon.

A film is many things, but one of the things it is, is a series of "moments", big ones and little ones. The more moments in the film, the more likely an audience will come out excited, talking about it. We shot a number of moments today, and although they were just little ones, perhaps just personal to me, they were very rewarding.

David's first shot, an ancient face against its ancient landscape, but chained around the neck; Damon and Gary pushing the injured Grant onto his horse, and Damon's

surprise when contradicted about going back; the small party against the giant landscape; David's perfect half-smile when hearing Gary challenged by Damon; Gary's inner crumbling when legitimately challenged by Damon, but his external conquering of it; Damon's dilemma when ordered at gunpoint to continue while hearing the hoarse, whispered pleading of Grant not to leave him behind. The actors (names and characters are becoming utterly interchangeable) served us well today...the drama of the film is really unfolding these last few days.

#### **Thursday, March 22, 2001**

As we learn more about how to shoot the different sorts of scenes in this environment, we become more confident in how we schedule and what can be achieved in a certain amount of time. Drips and drabs of material to be picked up are accumulating, and we have to make space in the schedule to do this.

So today represents such an effort...what had previously been scheduled for a day and a half ought to be achievable in the day.

The first scene was fairly long and quite complicated, both technically and for performance: the Tracker, aware that the Philosopher is falling further and further behind, stops and refuses to go on; the Fanatic cajoles, shouts, whips, shoots at his feet; the Follower diffuses the situation and goes back for the Philosopher.

When presented with strong material in excellent locations, the temptation is always to try and match it with visual flourish. These scenes are, however, about faces, about what goes on in the minds of the protagonists, so whatever possibilities existed in the moments of bullet hits and guns firing and whips cracking, technically tricky material to shoot anyway, these were put aside in favour of faces.

We began with running the scene preparatory to shooting David's material first. Immediately the scene began to crackle and spark. Shooting David's face as the whip hit his shoulders, as the gun directed at his feet went off, was immediate reward for the stylistic decision taken. And when the Fanatic, having calmed down, tells the Tracker he'll probably hang when they get back, and the Tracker responds with his "Yes Boss. Poor blackfella, been born for that noose, eh?" and they both begin to laugh, there was both hell and heaven in that scene.

Shooting Gary's material for that scene was really no different, except that the emotions were so opposed and the balance of them was more complex. The Fanatic is losing his grip on power here, and he doesn't like it. Nor does he know how to handle it. There was really no need to see the surrounds when his face was being as expressive as it was.

It's interesting for me to note that the balance of these writings has changed from describing process to dealing with the material of the film. That's a fair reflection of the way the shoot and schedule have gone. The earlier shooting was dramatically less complex, and we were very much coming to grips with how to shoot in this environment, what we could do with what was available to us, how much time it would take to get from here to there, whether the horses could do this or that.

As we've become more comfortable with the physical aspects of the shoot, so has the material we've been shooting become less comfortable, more performance dependent, more emotionally disturbing. I think we've hit it right with this, because it's given the actors quite a lot of time to find their characters, their physicalities, their familiarities with each other and all that exists outside them. The ease and finesse of Damon's little cameo in the scene today, when with a couple of lines of dialogue he defuses the situation, then wheels his horse and gallops off to find the Philosopher, would have been unthinkable near the beginning of the shoot, when he was still trying to sort out his relationship with his horse, his character and the Fanatic.

Onto the next location, just a short distance away, for a scene to be shot as close to sunset as we could manage. Five shots to be done, how late do we dare leave the first and still get them all in? At the beginning of the shoot I suspect we would have started significantly earlier...now we left ourselves just an hour to get them all in.

And it was not really a problem, apart from a very tricky little horse positioning exercise in the middle of proceedings which threatened to derail our best-laid plans. As usual, however, the horses and their handlers were up to the task, ultimately allowing an extra shot with time to spare.

Then a nice end to the day...after the rest of the crew and cast had left, I sat with David and the sound department on the hill as the sun set, recording some wild lines in the deep, deep quiet (interrupted at awkward times by persistent crow calls and the bleating of two feral goats perched impossibly high on the crags above us).

### **Friday, March 23, 2001**

Almost the less said about today, the better: after a succession of really very good days, this one was about as bad as you get.

We had a later start because of a night shot that had to be done with the horses (they're scheduled to finish at the end of next week), and by ten in the morning we'd already changed our minds several times as to what to begin with...

The forecast was for rain in the afternoon, but the clouds were behaving unpredictably, seeming likely to set in one minute, then almost disappearing the next.

We started as per schedule, a location close by for a couple of shots to complete a scene shot in the sun, and shoot a short transitional scene concentrating on the Philosopher that ought be shot in the sun but that we could get away with in cloud.

Most of these shots were on horse-cam (the steadicam rig attached to a horse's saddle), and because Grant was ready first, we shot the first part of his scene...in the sun, because it was sunny.

Next ready was Damon, the Follower, so to use time most efficiently, we switched to his shot for the completion of the next scene. A take in the sun, timing not quite right, another take aborted near the beginning, then...wait for the sun as a large cloud went by. By the time that large cloud had passed, another had formed in its place, and another, and another.

Now what to do? Re-shoot Grant's shot in cloud and complete that scene? Wait for sun? Move locations to that distant one where we still had six shots to do that had to be done in cloud but that would take the best part of two hours to move to?

Ten or fifteen minutes of cloud frustration later and we decided to move, do those shots, then come back and do a dawn scene under cloud. Pack up, move, horses into the truck, truck moves, horses a fairly long walk, we're set up by the time they arrive, let's shoot.

First shot is of the party of three travelling unaware that the Philosopher has been speared and is no longer on his horse. For almost the first time in the entire shoot, one of the horses (the Philosopher's riderless one) is recalcitrant, refusing to take the path the other horses take. It takes another path, take no good, wranglers running after it in the bush, back it comes. Another take, another path taken by the horse, again no good, again the wranglers run.

Try something else. Again. Another take. Try something else. And so on. I start to think about changing the nature of the scene, but eventually the horse behave acceptably and we move on. At least the cloud is thick and even and the light consistent with the rest of the scene.

We're within two or three shots of completion of the scene when it starts to spit with rain. Lunch break is called (it's now three in the afternoon), but that doesn't make it stop raining. By the end of lunch we make another decision: back to base to try and pick up the one rain shot we need, that came about the last time it rained. Horses away, lug stuff back down the hill, pack up, still not a single scene completed today, about four useable shots only.

Back at base and set up for the shot. Rain is light...too heavy to do the other stuff, but too light for this one. We wait. The horses arrive, we do a take in the light rain, it just might work. We wait. The rain doesn't vary. Damon, who's wet for this shot, is taken inside for some soup to warm him up (it's actually quite cool out there, and various crew members are lamenting the fact they didn't bring enough warm things to wear).

Damon's soup drinking is interrupted by the rain becoming somewhat heavier. Out he runs, another take, this one has a better chance of working, but is it enough? Seconds after the take is complete, the rain eases to its former annoying lightness...we had a four minute window and were able to take advantage of it.

Another hour of waiting for it to rain really properly, but it didn't. Meanwhile, set up nearby for our first

night shot, with lights, of the Tracker leading the horses away prior to confronting the Fanatic. Some cunning placement of the lights meant we could shoot even in light rain, and as soon as it was dark enough we shot, one take and no rehearsal because of the rain (nothing worse than having to dry out horses as well as an actor before a take), simple, the one bit of straightforward shooting for the day.

Six shots in a day, one scene completed but another incomplete one to take its place. If we hadn't done so well earlier in the week the schedule would now be getting quite tight, but we're still fine (unless we get more days like today).

### **Monday, March 26, 2001**

You win some, you lose some: last Friday we lost a few; today we won some, despite the fact that David had picked up a fairly severe throat infection and had practically no voice. If he could walk, we'd shoot, avoiding as much as possible any dialogue sequences, but being prepared to post-synch if necessary.

A fairly hefty day was scheduled...the walk-in to American Gap to attempt once again the scene that our first rain had interrupted over a week ago (over a lifetime ago), two scenes on the way out, and two scenes added to that day's work, one early morning, one late afternoon reshoot of a shot that had had a hair in the gate.

I was prepared for the early morning one, in that I'd been out early Sunday morning and worked out the exact camera position and the exact time we should roll film (for the rising sun). And the best laid plans came to fruition, in that we were set up, the horses arrived on time, the actors were there to get on the horses, we rolled once at the appointed time, rolled again about ten minutes later when the sun was a little higher, both good, onto the next location.

On the way we went past the afternoon location, which the wranglers had picked as a good spot for the four to be coming down a steep incline after the packhorse is speared. Not only was this a terrific match for Split Rock (where we'd shot the packhorse spearing), but the light, at this moment, was almost perfect to be doing the shot.

Down went the camera, up went the horses and actors, a few minutes' wait until the light was just so (the sun had further to travel to breach this hill than the one at the previous location), light adjudged perfect, roll film, another scene in the can (as Owen would say, "Too easy.").

Finally all the gear was carried into American Gap, the camera set for the first shot, horses and actors ready. Not even nine-fifteen yet, and we'd known that there wouldn't be enough light in the canyon until at least nine-thirty, and we'd already shot two scenes instead of the one that was scheduled. Time to clamber high up the cliffs, to find a shot to end the scene with. Found what I thought was an impossible spot, only to see Jonesy clamber up carrying a mug of tea, not a drop spilt. At that point I knew we could get the camera up there and shoot (which is what we did).

In contrast to the previous effort here, shooting was smooth and easy, and conditions were perfect (still, bright and sunny, no cloud). So much so that we'd just finished the last shot and were about to do some extra sound when various visitors to set finally turned up (Bridget Ikin representing the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Miranda Dear representing SBS). They'd had significant vehicle problems (just like we'd had in the first days) and managed only to get there after the action was over. Still, there were now extra hands to carry.

Back down the creekbed towards our last scheduled location for the day, two scenes, in which we, the audience, learn for the first time that the Tracker is up to something.

By now the moving of large amounts of equipment by hand and foot didn't seem to be such a problem. We set up, worked out the scene, and then called lunch (much to the chagrin of the visitors, who happened to turn up for the only Saturday we were not working, were due to leave any moment, and had still not witnessed a single shot actually being done).

Visitors gone, we shot the two scenes in quick time after lunch. There was still plenty of day left, so we set out to retrace the previous Friday's steps, and pick up some of the material we'd dropped then. Onto our fifth location for the day, steadicam on the horse for at least three but preferably five shots. Still conditions were perfect. Still, as if to make up for the previous

shooting day and the two-day weekend, crew and cast worked perfectly. Five horsecam shots? No problem, and two more unfinished scenes were now complete.

Still time to attack one final scene, just when the light's starting to look great again. Another move, 2 kms away, Gary and Damon riding the horses over (faster than trucking them), Grant as the injured Philosopher now tied to his horse, shot looks good, shoot, done for the day, early.

Five location moves, a big catch-up on loose ends in the schedule, some space created in case there's problems to come, good material, little more can be asked from any day.

### **Tuesday, March 27, 2001**

Almost can't be bothered writing this after a tiring, tiring day...fifth week of shoot, nothing much has stopped, a big walk-in day today (hotter than it's been for a while), an even bigger performance day, not enough sitting down...the list goes on.

Hard to know where to start. Vehicles found impossible ways to reduce the length of the walk-in. Gathered in the appropriate spot, we blocked the scene (a different scene than had originally been scheduled first-up, but the extras were now not going to be arriving until late this afternoon, so there had to be a fair degree more shooting out of sequence than is usual for us). First up was the Fanatic shooting, the Follower in turn putting a gun to the Fanatic's head.

The journey from script to final film is always an interesting one. There are so many things one just doesn't expect, not the least of which is the power of some scenes when brought to life by the actors. I always underestimate this aspect...I have hopes for certain outcomes, but they are more often exceeded than disappointed.

And so it proved with today. Pivotal scenes for both the Fanatic and the Follower, and each of Gary and Damon hit the spot consistently and well, occasionally brilliantly. I think it will be a long time before I forget Damon's screaming at the Fanatic echoing from cliff face to cliff face. Equally the speed with which Gary hit the ground when the Follower fires a shot just past his face. David being thrown the key to his neckchain, unsure whether he



should use it. And long will I remember the pure poetry of Gary's shot when he's first been chained, and already he begins to try and subvert the new order.

A funny thing that...we have one of our biggest performance days in one of our best locations and I can think of little to say about it. But as I write this I hear David in the room next door, patiently learning his lines with Airlie again (as he often does also with Wayne and Joanne), part of a sort of behind-the-scenes web of effort I know little about, but which is clearly one of the strengths of this production. It's why we can have good performance days.

### **Wednesday, March 28, 2001**

Back to yesterday's location to complete the scenes around this sequence, with high hopes and good reason to think we'd be out early: the bulk of the material had been shot; we knew the nature and scale of the walk-in; less gear had to be carried in than the previous day (ladders, apple boxes, reflectors and so on had been left there); and what remained to be shot seemed, on the whole, simpler than what we'd achieved the previous day.

First up a shot from the track in, a transition shot to get us into this terrain. The scale of the day immediately began to become apparent as a vague level of confusion surrounded the edges of doing the shot. Walkie-talkies malfunctioned, vehicles with extras raced past the turn-off point, questions arose as to who should be where for what. The shot itself went off simply enough.

The vague level of confusion persisted for most of the day...uncertainty about the actual scene whatever next shot was meant for, which and how many extras were required, even which direction the camera was going to be pointed in. I'm not at all certain what caused it (it seemed like there was just a lack of attention to what was going on), but in retrospect the most likely cause was something I've come across before with my style of working - I'm so sure of what exactly is going on and what will logically happen next that I forget to tell others, thinking that they too (somehow mysteriously) know the course of events with the same precision. They don't, of course (they're trusting me to tell them), and hence people end up in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing.

This is not to say that any of this was going badly (it wasn't), simply that progress was a little slower, a little less efficient than either one hopes or that yesterday's efforts might have led one to expect.

We struggled on till lunch time: wide shot (from a little cliff face) the tracking party's arrival in the valley; closer shot their coming to a halt when the Fanatic sees a family group of blacks further down; POV shot the group; POV shot the group with smoke from the first gunshot and the first victim falling; steadicam Tracker's POV shot for a later scene; ladder shot the party, the Fanatic now in chains, walking towards the site; steadicam the Tracker coming to a halt as he sees the results of the Fanatic's efforts.

After lunch was one of David's biggest performance scenes, wherein he pulls the chained Fanatic off his horse to try and show him, get through to him, what he's done. The plan was simple enough, designed to allow the maximum performance fluidity in a situation where actor movement was not always going to be predictable - a high wide shot to get them into the spot, then a low medium shot that could encompass almost anything likely to happen from that point.

David, Gary, Grant, the horse and the horse wranglers rehearsed the pulling off from the horse. First Coop pulled Jim off a few times without chains, then Jim chained. Effortless and safe. Then David pulling Jim off, finally David pulling the chained Gary off. This was going to work.

Wide shot set up. This didn't work. The youngest of the extras was unable to keep still, as was required by his supposed state of deadness. Quick re-think, maybe we can get four or five seconds from the shot, now zoom in tighter on David to avoid the problem. Mostly fine, but as the Tracker squats down at the body of the elder, the youngest of the dead flashed through frame being undead. Fine, we'll pick up David coming down to the body in the low shot, still okay.

The low shot, and David, who'd been edgy about this scene for some time (knowing what was required of him), was really there. The sight of old white-bearded Billy, a most gentle man, lying there unmoving, was all David needed. The heaving of his breath and the flash in his eyes as he strode towards the chained and manacled Fanatic sitting trussed and helpless on his horse was what the horse didn't need. Despite all the practice and

rehearsals, the horse must have thought David was going to kill it...it started in a panic, dancing away from David, Gary holding on for dear life with one restricted hand.

Gary managed to stay on, the horse was calmed. A further series of gradually escalating rehearsals with David and the wranglers patting and soothing the horse between each of them. All was fine.

Take two. Again, somehow despite the major interruption, David managed to find what was required, and again the horse was in fear of its life. Again Gary managed to stay on, but there was no percentage in attempting to do the sequence in the way we'd planned. Stop, calm the horse, rethink.

We'd now cobbled together the sequence up to the point of the Tracker striding towards the Fanatic, and, with a spooked horse to contend with, the only way forward in the time available was to continue to try and cobble together the sequence, rather than allow it to flow and develop as probably would have been best. The shade of the cliff face we were working next to was approaching, and we'd have to work fast to get away with this one.

We did work fast: despite that, a third take of the major performance section between David and Gary was aborted because of creeping shadow. One shot to get, of the Follower (still in the sun because he was sitting on his horse). Quick re-set and we were filming. During that take I realised what perhaps I should have done with the previous shot, in terms of how the dialogue should have played. Damon told me afterwards that he'd been aware, from the corner of his eye, of me looking at his shot in a suddenly peculiar way - I'd been lining up the possibility of another quick shot.

And that's what happened...a hasty reposition, a very, very tight two-shot, new instructions for the actors, roll sound, camera, action...felt much better, worth trying another one, the actors almost physically dragged two metres into a space where we'd have at least sixty seconds of sun, and the horse, and the camera, rolling almost before things had stopped moving, cut. Sun gone, scene, maybe, in the can.

We won't really know until it's cut whether we managed to scramble the scene into anything like what the expectations for it were. That will require refinement, the exploration of possibilities, the giving it of the

context of the entire film to that point. Sometimes you can tell whether you've succeeded in salvaging, or whether you've failed. Today I had no idea.

### **Thursday, March 29, 2001**

Something of a special day today...our first day at the "hanging tree", plus the ending of the film to be shot.

Now there's something of a story to this hanging tree. The location is the fifth campsite, where we have four days in total of shooting, two days and two nights. For the night shoots, the locations have to be particularly accessibly: we have to have lights, a generator, a dolly, all the sorts of things that one has all the time on a conventional shoot.

So location choice has to do as much about being able to get to it as it has with how it looks. This fifth campsite was a particular problem, because there are a number of day scenes, where outlook is important, as well as the night scenes, where outlook is unimportant but accessibility is.

Central to this location is also that there should be a tree (preferably a dead one) from which a character can be hung. Whilst searching for this location, the first thing I abandoned was the notion that there would happen to be a perfect tree on an accessible location that had a good outlook (the film ends on this location, so it has to look good). The tree could come later.

Location picked, I was blithely able to say, "Oh yes, and we do need to put a dead tree there, one that we can hang the Fanatic from." That was easy enough to say but a little more difficult in practice. The task of getting a tree up there fell to Owen.

"Which tree?" Owen would ask, and I'd tell him that I hadn't had time to select it yet (largely true). "How do you propose we should move it?" Owen would ask, and I'd answer in a way that would reduce the difficulty of the task, such as, "Oh, we'll just cut it down and tie it to the bull-bar of one of the four-wheel drives and move it and put it in a hole we'll dig up there." And then I'd say, "Too easy!", reflecting Owen's own, most-used phrase.

The weeks went by and we came closer to the bit in the schedule where the tree was needed, and Owen felt the

need to get the tree up there. If only he knew which tree. He goaded me into action by telling me he'd found a tree. To me, of course, that tree was completely unsatisfactory, it was a dead eucalypt of some sort, and the fifth campsite terrain was mulga country...it had to be a mulga.

There are tens of thousands of dead mulgas on Arkaroola, so I spent half a day one weekend checking many of them out. I'd throw a rope over a suitable branch of a suitable tree, hang on it, jiggle up and down severely, to test it for strength. Eventually I found the tree I wanted, but it was some 30 or 40 metres from the road, up a steep hillside. And it was, for a mulga, quite tall and solid.

"That one, Owen", I said. Owen nodded sagely. "How do you propose we move it?" said the sage Owen. "Oh, just cut it down, get eight or ten blokes to carry it down to the road and, I don't know, put it on a truck or something. The simplest ways are usually the best ways."

Owen had, meanwhile, organised someone with a drilling rig to dig the tree hole..."just digging a hole" at Arkaroola is not really possible, almost everything is rock or stone.

The man with the drilling rig came and drilled the hole (he came, I think, from 150kms away, which caused it to be a fair expense). Eight or ten blokes are not so easy to organise...the crew works long hours and there are not many spares at Arkaroola. "Blokes" were brought in from as far away as Nepabunnah, more than an hour's drive away (another fair expense).

The dead mulga was cut, carried down the hillside by a dozen or so blokes, tied to a truck, driven to its hole about 5 kms away, and concreted into the hole. A triumph for Owen, and today we got to shoot there for the first time.

We used it to good effect too. It was a lovely day's shooting: relaxed, productive, what I would have wanted it to be. After the previous day, it was a positive joy.

And we shot the last shot of the film, wherein David rides into the sunset. Spectacular...it too seemed everything I hoped it would be.

**Saturday, March 31, 2001**

Up early early for a reduced unit, an attempt at an ambitious shot: the Fanatic hanging from his tree, silhouetted and completely enveloped by the sun (our 1600mm lens should do the trick), from a position down in the valley below the ridge camp location.

Measurements of sun position at sunrise had been taken but we'd not had the opportunity to do so at the right time at the actual location...camera position was critical and we were starting from a position of informed guesswork.

Small team on the ridge preparing Gary's hanging harness (previously tested) in the dark. Small team in the valley below setting up camera. Robertto high on the opposing hill to give advance information on what the sun was doing. As we waited with camera, several decisions were made...camera position seemed a little better higher up (this was to have a major effect on the result).

First rays of sun hit Robertto up above. He guessed we should move a little to the right. We moved. The sun crept lower down the hill behind us, and again we moved a little higher, as if impatient to get it done. Robertto moved down lower, with the rim of sun, and hasty little lateral movements were made to adjust, so that the sun would rise absolutely behind the hanging body of the Fanatic. Seconds to go, another adjustment three feet sideways, ladder removed on the hanging hill, camera rolled.

It was good, but not great. Even before the shot was over, a new position down the hill a bit and still in the shade, was selected. "Cut! Move move move!" Down the hill scrambled the camera crew, radio from the hanging hill can we take Gary down no we're still shooting. Camera set, shooting, with seconds to spare. Exact position slightly out, abort the shot, move further down the hill, no you can't take Gary down we're still shooting.

Take three, looked like we had it right...but no, much the same as take one, we hadn't allowed sufficiently for the lateral movement of the sun. Somehow, there was still a little more valley below us, so down we went again, off-set the chosen position by a metre and a half, a frantic film magazine change, no you can't take Gary down, we think we have it this time and this is definitely the last one, hang on for three minutes if you can.

And there it was, the perfect shot (through the viewfinder at least), the golden ball of the sun rising to completely envelop the tree and the Fanatic. Our movement up the hill had allowed four attempts at it instead of one, and we'd learnt a little from each. And back for breakfast by seven, Gary a little sore for the experience.

We were now scrambling to complete all material with horses, which we have for only two more days. Off for a little scene where the reduced party set off having buried the Philosopher...an unexpected pleasure in the still-early morning light. Then again a reduced unit for some steadicam re-shoots (a shot that had excessive sun flare on the Fanatic's face and some POV shots that hadn't quite worked the first time).

Lunch, and a quick reshoot of a slomo shot of the Philosopher riding along, then a break and off to the hanging ridge for a sunset scene and a post-sunset scene. These are tricky beasts...there is a window of less than an hour to shoot each of them, one just before sunset and one just after sunset. They involved dialogue, performance, a hanging corpse in one of them, a campfire in the other (often irritating to get consistent). Still, by now we were bold enough to try both in succession.

Preparations until the light was deemed right...three shots in the first scene, three for the second.

Smooth, smooth shooting. Damon and David well-focussed for the first, a great look, good performances. Shooting the second scene after sunset was also a pleasure...the light was lovely, the scene calm, Gary and Damon and David all absolutely there, just a little dialogue from David, the looks between the Fanatic, at this stage chained to the bottom of the tree, and the Follower, cleaning what was the Fanatic's revolver, saying more than dialogue ever could.

#### **Location visit report by Executive Producer Bridget Ikin:**

Just back from visiting the set of THE TRACKER at Arkaroola in South Australia. I'd forgotten why my bag was so heavy, until I opened it, and found it filled with 'interesting' rocks I picked up on walks around Arkaroola.

It's ten hours hot and dusty driving north from Adelaide, the last big part of it on an incredibly rocky unsealed road, up into the extraordinary, remote terrain of the desert ranges. I can appreciate now why Rolf de Heer was so keen to shoot THE TRACKER here. It offers such a variety of extreme - and different - landscapes, all within a (fairly) close range of each other. I've yet to see any rushes, but the film will certainly look splendid.

This is no-frills filmmaking ... everything so pared back and lean, and functional - as suits both the story and the unforgiving location. A small crew (about 15 on set), hand picked by Rolf and producer Julie Ryan, and mostly a dedicated team they've worked with before. They're used to Rolf's style and expectations, conscious of the need to stay flexible and mobile. It's impressive to watch how he galvanises them, converting problems into challenges. It's equally impressive to see how hard they all work, in the fierce dry, unforgiving heat. There's no relief, making a film in which every single scene is set outside.

I watched the horses walking over the hard, hard stones of the dry river bed, and felt for their discomfort in the heat.

I observed the good humour of the four actors. Being outside in such intense heat for all the sunlight hours of each day is hardly glamorous.

I sympathised with the production co-ordinator returning from standing in the phone booth for two hours (no phones available up there), having chewed up many dollars in phone cards - again!

I had a glimpse of the patience required to work out here, as I waited for the mechanic to fix a problem with our 4-wheel drive, and appreciated that you can't force things to happen faster than they happen! With only three flights a week (and they land 130 unsealed km away!) supplies are precious commodities, not to be squandered or abused. As is water.

But Arkaroola is a 'resort' too (as long as you don't conjure up images of spa pools or tropical foliage) - a huge property 'farming' people rather than animals. Because it's such an important area geologically, it attracts adventurers and travellers from around the world. Some of the world's oldest rocks and fossils have been found here.



There are two more weeks of the shoot to go, which will be the crew and cast's first chance to leave the property in over seven weeks. It's really a unique place to visit, but I suspect there will be few regrets for them, when they leave such a physically difficult and remote location.

And as for my 'interesting' rocks - well I guess I'll find a home for them, even though, off the ground at Arkaroola, they don't seem quite so fascinating! Perhaps they'll find a place beside my computer, as I tune into Rolf's daily - and increasingly fascinating - 'virtual' account of the filming, on this website.

### **Sunday, April 1, 2001**

Our final day with the horses, focussed on completing all shots and reshoots that require them. Principal among these was the completion of scene 64, wherein the Philosopher is speared. Two previous attempts to complete this scene came to naught for various reasons, and we'd been waiting all week for cloud cover so that we could do the final two shots to match those already done.

We'd had no cloud, and no cloud was forecast...and we had to shoot it today. Grappling with this problem last night, and thinking about what else needed to be shot on this day, I came to the conclusion that the best way to deal with the problem was to rewrite the second half of the scene into a new scene, put some time space between it and the first half, and shoot the new scene from scratch, in the sun if that was what presented itself.

New scene was presented at breakfast time, just prior to shooting and just after a reduced unit had already shot a sunrise pickup shot of the Tracker's hat on the ground (dating back to the very first morning's shoot). The actors seemed happy with the rewrite, each of them had something more to do than before and the scene was fresh, rather than a stale third attempt at the same thing.

Back again to the location, a hotter day on the possibly most inhospitable site of them all. Eleven shots to do instead of two, but hopefully the scene would be the better for it. We shot comfortably. The horse that had previously misbehaved had been given a different task to do, instead of walking down the hill in procession behind the other two, it was to come trotting around the corner and join them after they had stopped.

The wranglers did some closed-set training during a morning tea break, we came back and did the equivalent of the shot that had so confounded us previously, in one take. The difference between days when things go right and days when things go wrong...

Couldn't quite finish the scene before lunch, but the three shots after provided no problems (two channel 7 "blokes" doing a story on the film were roped in to hold our large reflector sheet when the breeze stiffened such that producer Julie Ryan, previously charged with the task, was in danger of becoming airborne).

As we finished our final shot of the scene, the first clouds drifted over the sun...the irony of the timing was hard to believe. If we'd waited we could have simply shot two shots to complete the scene under cloud, but I suspect the sequence is the better for not having done so..

One more shot here, the spear flying through the air. We'd sourced some spears locally, plus Wayne the armourer had spent considerable time fashioning one. Only Wayne's flew true and straight. Jonesy lobbed a stone for a trajectory for David (a truly expert spear thrower) to throw the spear past camera, David said yes, I can do that, we rolled camera, David threw the spear and it flew with incredible speed past camera, low and straight and much further than any of us had imagined it might. So low and fast, in fact, that it had sped past the bottom of frame before Jonesy had had time to even spot it.

Wayne retrieved the spear...the end had broken off. Modifications didn't help, it refused to fly again. We'll have to come back for a fourth time to finish the scene in its entirety, but at least we won't need the horses.

Then another pickup shot from the first day (the Tracker's POV walking down a creekbed, which we'd neglected to shoot first, before we, as a crew, had left too much evidence of our presence)...the intervening five weeks and some rain had freshened up the creekbed enormously and we shot the steadicam shot without incident.

Then a reshoot of the Tracker tracking, and the Fanatic following, and we'd done our last shot with the horses just after sunset. Jim and Coop (and Bill and Pete before them) were much-loved members of our little crew, and many were quite sad to see the end of this phase of the shooting. Many stories were traded in the bar that night,

stories for more horse films thought up (so we could all work together again), an altogether very fond farewell.

### **Monday, April 2, 2001**

Night shoots...a week of them starting from today, and they're not my favourite occupation. Everybody's sleep patterns are suddenly violently changed, you feel almost sick with fatigue by the time the first night is over, you don't sleep very well, you feel even worse when you wake up and then you have to do it all again.

Nevertheless there was a good deal of energy around, a supplemented electrical crew, a 3.7 metre diameter helium balloon to float above with lights in it, a dolly to be used, generator, lights and no horses.

The lead-up weather was not so promising...a constant threat of rain, quite cool, and, worst of all, windy. The balloon would work in the rain, but if the wind was too great we'd be in trouble. Down to the location before dark though, and the wind dropped completely. We had as still a night as we've experienced.

A very different feeling about this shooting. We were fixed to the one spot and shooting much more conventionally. Quite a long set up for the balloon and lights, tracks to be laid for the dolly, we even had a block through with the actors, something fairly unusual for this shoot. More than two hours elapsed before we were ready for the first shot, our first genuine track for the shoot.

The other slightly odd thing was that we were going to be travelling the length of the script, in order, over the five nights. There are five campsites spread evenly through the script, each with a very different mood as the events around them, which we have already shot, unfold. Characters are brought back to life (and killed off again), moods from early in the story have to be recalled, relationships are at different stages than where they end up.

And so we shot the first (and most benign) campsite scene. I'd almost forgotten what conventional shooting is like. Instead of almost everything being structured around the horses, almost everything is structured around the movement of lights and cutters. The same sort of performance flow is not possible, but there is more time to think between shots, more time to talk with the

actors. In a curious way, apart from the time pressure it was quite a relaxing way to shoot.

This first night there were two campsites to be shot (two nights are reserved for the fifth campsite), and just after the mealbreak we completed the first, and moved (walked) to the second, chosen entirely for its proximity to the first.

This was a big scene for Damon, as his character comes to terms with his own behaviour at the first massacre, and during which he puts his ukulele on the fire.

Another tracking shot, and shooting became momentarily tricky as light rain began to fall. Still the wind held off, however, and we shot through until the scene was almost complete.

Now time became the enemy...to finish on time, there was the choice of completing this scene (one shot of the ukulele catching fire) and dropping the next scene (a one shot scene of the three white men on guard), or shooting the next scene and leaving ourselves with another tricky pick-up to do. In the end it was decided to drop the next scene, which seemed okay on paper but was much less convincing after having seen the previous scene play out.

So we burnt the ukulele and called wrap.

### **Tuesday, April 3, 2001**

Night shoot two of five, one that feels very tight as far as schedule is concerned...four scenes, including one of the longest in the film, where the Follower, on picket duty after having his abilities questioned, discovers the Tracker is missing, has to wake the Fanatic to tell him, gets struck down, the Tracker turns up and is chained to a tree. Lots of movement of characters back and forth, a lot of screen time, night, all of it seemed quite difficult.

Previous planning indicated rather more shots than conventionally achievable. It's easy enough to get this amount of material in a very average way (stick the camera on a tripod with a wider lens and play the action), but to get it well you need to see, feel and understand the detail of the action.

An early afternoon recce with Jonesy, to lay down the specifics for his pre-light (exactly where will the

campfire be, for example, and what's the action and in which axis will it play) led to some discussion about the night ahead. We went into some depth about the main scene, and soon the thing to do seemed to be to take a risk...look at covering the scene in a single, long, complex shot, which might take hours to do (how many hours?), see if the guts of the scene would hold in it, and work out what else would then need to be shot to complete it.

So the night started like that...we blocked the action with the actors, until all were comfortable with precisely how it would go. We built a long tracking shot around the action, back and forth as required, starting as the Follower's shot and becoming the Fanatic's shot as he took over. The shot worked out, Jonesy cautioned me that he had a bit to do, a few problems to work out, was I sure I wanted to go down this road?

Is it working? Yes. Can you work out the problems? Probably. Let's give it a go then, I can't think of any other way to get the night in.

So Jonesy and his augmented crew of electricians set to work on the lights, Dunkles, Mike and Judd set to work on the camera movement and focus, Damon set to work on the precise path he would travel. Depth of field of focus would be extremely narrow, a slight deviation may cause the shot to become unusable.

Round and round his circuit Damon paced, until the movement felt clear and comfortable to him, almost second nature.

Some hours later: the lighting problems had been solved, the camera and actors were prepared, we were ready to have a go at it. Some rehearsals for camera and focus, let's shoot.

Take one...it was in the can.

It was, after all the preparation, quite unexpected, so we did a second take just to be sure.

The rest of the night was an anti-climax...solid work to be done but knowing we had the night under control. Some people seem to thrive with these night shoots, others have difficulty adjusting, no matter how much coffee they drink. Nights take a lot from some people...David, for example, being from the tropics and not having an ounce of spare flesh on him, feels the cold terribly. To see

him hunched up wearing anything and everything that's around, close to a fire lit to help keep him warm, is enough to make one feel guilty, despite the fact that doing the film was his choice.

### **Wednesday, April 4, 2001**

Day whatever it is of the shoot, sometime during the second last week. Somehow night shoots seem to give you less time, even though there are still 24 hours in the day and we don't shoot for any longer. Maybe more time is spent getting to sleep than sleeping, more time spent waking up than being awake.

One day/night folds into the next, and it becomes hard to differentiate between them unless there is some sort of major highlight. David was given the night off to preserve him for the rest of the shoot...he has a lot of dialogue to come, he's just a shape lying in the background for most of the scenes and the one shot we need him for, an extreme closeup of his eye opening and closing, is easily picked up on one of the following nights.

Tonight the Fanatic helps the Philosopher on the way to that land from whence no traveller ever returns. A gory scene if played literally, but just emotionally so if played right for the style of this film.

Have dolly (during the night shoots) will use it, and the shots were constructed around the feet of the Fanatic quietly wandering around the campsite checking that all are asleep before he commits his dreadful deed. This was an almost relaxing way to shoot...by committing to this style for the scenes it seemed unlikely we would end up in time trouble, and so it proved to be.

A different lesson in acting for Damon...his entire performance today consists of him being asleep, and after his heroics of yesterday, he deserved the break. But it wasn't much of a break. The first hour lying on stony ground in a canvas swag is pleasant enough, the second hour is bearable, after that it becomes distinctly unpleasant. And Grant had it worse than Damon did, lying supposedly wounded in a most unnatural position so that the Fanatic can achieve his purpose.

Gary was all precision as usual for the technical stuff, and hit the right tone emotionally for the performance. This was the third night with the balloon, and we've been

very lucky so far with the weather...three completely still nights in a row, after some of the nights earlier in the shoot have been fairly violently windy.

Tonight was a highlight in the "dragoon all visitors to set into working in any capacity required" methodology we employ. I thought the sights of completion guarantor Annie Browning pulling weeds and lawyer/E.P. Bryce Menzies sweeping footprints were the limit. However to see James Geurts, a casual visitor to set, dressed in the Tracker's costume to be the shape in the background, and, in Beverley's usual thorough be-prepared-for-anything manner, having been made completely black, was something else (it was something else - a casual glance in the distance and you'd swear David was on set, but up close James just looked ridiculous).

#### **Thursday, April 5, 2001**

The first of two nights shooting at the fifth campsite, and the work I'd done on the scenes to be shot was beginning to reveal that shooting them as written was an impossible task in two nights. There was just too much detail to get in, too many shots required or fewer shots with a much greater degree of difficulty taking probably as much time. And the action played for far too long to seriously try and film, and and and...

Apart from the lead-up scenes that had to be shot, the main scene was one of the biggest in the film: the Tracker has drugged the Follower and prepares to put the Fanatic on trial for murder, then holds the impromptu kangaroo court. The preparations were the problem, to get to the actual trial has to be convincing, and the leaving out of even one little step would start the audience questioning.

I'd been up late after Wednesday's night shoot grappling with the problem, had reduced the number of shots required down to an absolute minimum, and still there were far too many. I drifted off to sleep with an image in my mind, a closeup of the Fanatic sitting chained to his tree with the Tracker preparing ropes very out-of-focus in the background.

Late morning I was again grappling with the problem, and realised that a radical solution was required. I had to think laterally. A number of things came together almost simultaneously: I couldn't cut any further, so maybe the answer lay in writing more; there was the image I'd slept

with overnight; there was a vague memory of having heard a story about Gary, and how he has an almost photographic memory for script.

An idea came to me...swing the scene to becoming the Fanatic's scene, not the Tracker's scene as written. Have the Fanatic tell a story, have him talking for his life, concentrate entirely on his growing fears as the preparations are made around him. Then the nature of the preparations, interesting enough psychologically if shot well, becomes irrelevant, we need simply to hint at them being made.

I spoke to Gary about the possibility of him suddenly getting a huge amount of extra dialogue, a soliloquy really, to be performed the following night. He was, of course, keen on the idea, so I set to writing.

Sometimes these things come, sometimes they don't. This time it did. I must have been thinking about this stuff for quite some time without knowing it, because two hours later there was a draft, two solid pages. Gary read casually through it, we made minor changes and read through it again. Remarkable, it worked. Even more remarkably, Gary put the pages face down and performed almost the first minute of it flawlessly, having read it only twice. What a gift for an actor to have.

Two extra pages written, at least twelve or fifteen shots less to do. I went to the shoot with at least a degree of confidence that the scenes were now achievable.

First we shot a sunset-for-sunrise scene, of the Follower waking up to see the Fanatic hanging, the bloodied Tracker lying on the ground. Damon was in fine form - no dialogue had been written, but on the first take he found his voice to such effect that James (Currie), listening intently through his headphones (he never looks at what's happening on set, only listens) was almost blasted out of his little canvas chair with surprise.

The window of time of the sun being low enough was too small for us to achieve the entire scene in one day (more tomorrow), so on it was to the night shoot, setting up the balloon and preparing to shoot when sufficiently dark. There was still a fair bit to do, but all went so well (David very focussed and funny in the scene where he pretends that the Fanatic's suspicions about being poisoned are true, Damon gagging on the rabbit when he thinks it's poisonous, not difficult because it tasted as if was, David's pickup shot from the night before), that



we were suddenly facing the prospect of shooting Gary's new piece today rather than tomorrow.

Gary? He was prepared. He'd been working on the lines all afternoon and evening (in between being hung from a tree, chained to a tree, forced to eat charcoal-encrusted rabbit and all those other things an actor does in an average day).

We set the shot, worked out the actions for David (he too has to keep going for the three or four minutes of Gary's speech), adjusted lights, prepared to shoot.

Less than twelve hours after it had been written, Gary delivered the complex three and a half minute monologue flawlessly, three times. It was astonishing.

### **Friday, April 6, 2001**

Day thirty-something of principal photography, hopefully the last of the night shoots. Back to the fifth campsite to complete the sunset-for-sunrise scene started yesterday, and to finally hang the Fanatic.

Early indications were not good...sky was mostly cloudy, an occasional bit of sun breaking through - we'd need the sun to match what we'd already done, but at least the shots required didn't have any sky in them. Camera ready, sun pushes through to about three quarter strength but with a huge cloud bank looming, quick, get David down on the ground now, roll camera, do a shot, keep rolling talk him through another action so at least we have a scene if we get no more sun. Cut, at least we have a scene, I breathe a little more easily.

Set up the last shot for the scene, wait. A minute of break, shoot, have to go again. The problem with these situations is that you have no time to think, you simply grab every possible little shooting window, and if there's a problem with the shot, or the dialogue as written, you tend not to find that, but ascribe the lack of success to the fact that you're scrambling for the shot. Several takes later we had the shot, not very comfortably, and the sun was definitely gone for the rest of its stay today. Only then did Damon and I work out that the problem lay in the writing of one line of dialogue. I think we can cut around it.

Then onto the business end of the day, which starts, on these night shoots, with the floating of the balloon. A

persistent gusty breeze made things difficult, as did the fact that we never seem to have enough people to do these sorts of jobs as well as get everything else done. Balloon finally up (rather shaky in the wind, and threatening to impale itself upon one of the many dead mulgas that inhabit the landscape), we started.

One shot later and suddenly the balloon was caught in a downdraft and was almost spiked. We continued with the balloon held manually down low, until equally suddenly the wind just dropped and was not felt again that night.

There were two tremendously important performances to capture tonight, those of the Tracker and the Fanatic in their final face-off. Get those two and you'd have to say, in the end, we have a film.

David's direction was first, so he lined up for his shots. He'd been practising this material since almost the beginning of the shoot, with Joanne, with Wayne, with Airlie, with anyone who would listen. It was difficult material, a mixture of very proper "English" and Latin, and he was very keyed up about it.

The camera rolled and the keyed-up David disappeared, as if by spirits. In his place stood the Tracker, "I charge you with the murder of innocent people. How do you plead?". It was quite something. At the end of the take, before I had the opportunity to say cut, he started again, from the beginning, a different, more angry version..."Sic transit gloria mundi" and he turns to begin hoisting the Fanatic up.

Cut. We had half the scene, and had it exceptionally well. Turn around into Gary's direction, the balloon moving exercise with all hands on deck, lay the tracks, measure the focus, put the chain around Gary's neck, hoist the rope until he is standing, manacled and choking, on his toes. "Higher" he gurgles. A centimetre up. "Another notch" he manages to croak, then signals with his eyes that that is enough. Roll sound and camera straightaway, a fast track in from wide to tight with David co-ordinated to come towards him.

Cut, release Gary, sorry, we'll have to go again. Again Gary is choked to within an inch of no longer being able to bear it, again the track, again something not quite right with the shot. We have it on the third attempt.

Then Gary's tight shot, the exchange with the Tracker. This time he insists on an even higher hoist, so that he

can barely balance on his tiptoes. Roll sound and camera...it's awful, unbearable, breathtaking..."And so passes the glorious world". Cut, and we have the scene.

### **Saturday, April 7, 2001**

A short day, originally not scheduled, to turn around into days next week and to clean up a couple of missing bits.

First a reduced crew back to our inhospitable location to shoot the spear flying through the air (before it impales itself into the Philosopher). Wayne had been busy making a few more spears, they all seemed to want to fly and we were in with a fair chance of finally completing a scene started weeks before (distant memory only, by now).

We set up on the hill, David about fifty metres away, a target of a piece of hanging carpet the size of a person erected about four metres from the camera. The first spear flew. Again trajectory miscalculated by us, but the spear thwacked dead centre into the carpet. David knows his spear throwing.

After that it was fairly simple...the spears flew with relatively unerring accuracy, we shot, real time, slo-mo, we packed up and travelled onto the next location for the dawn scene (to be shot at dusk) of the death of the Philosopher.

The rest of the crew was already setting up. First shot worked out, camera position found, various reflectors and sheets inserted, wait for the sun to set.

Shoot first shot, another tricky one for David, he has to give the Philosopher absolution in Latin. As with the previous night he was right there, a terrific take straightaway, no need to do another, one good take is all you can use. That was Grant's last shot (on camera, he stays with us for safety), applause and smiles, finally the Philosopher is dead...he's taken weeks to die.

Coverage on Damon and David, then Gary as the Fanatic, quite removed from the scene around the body. Cut, that was Gary's last shot in the film. The emotion that starts here at location, with a wrap drink at dusk in an extraordinary setting, will continue until after dawn (so I hear). Two actors and three days of shooting left.

**Monday April 9, 2001**

**Location visit report by Executive Producer Bryce Menzies:**

Just getting to the location for the shooting of "The Tracker" was an adventure. First a plane from Melbourne to Adelaide, then a twin engine small plane to Leigh Creek.

We landed in better than a paddock, the airstrip was bitumen, better than the roads I was about to discover, which was the next part of the trip, after doing the crew's shopping.

This was the outback! So much part of being an Australian, yet we experience it so rarely - at least the majority of us anyway. On the road to Arkaroola you could look in every direction and not see any sign of civilisation. No mobile phone - my office could not get to me - freedom!

After a coffee I was on location. The light was low, so the crew were just about to move up the creekbed. At least I could help lug some of the gear. As one of the "executives", once a film is finished financing and provided that everything on the shoot is going smoothly, there is not much I can do on the set.

I'd done my job - the crew were getting paid. I watched. The crew was small - a relief because shooting this far away from civilisation can be difficult with too many people. Cast was contained - again a relief.

Most of the crew seem to have a couple of jobs and all the actors were pitching in. A good sign. I sat around, as one does, tried to make myself useful, a bit difficult, and enjoyed the rest of the day in a remarkable location.

It wasn't until the next day that I witnessed some "action", actors performing with dialogue. While the day started early, it took some time to get the first shot in the bag - technical problems and a few trips for Chris back to base and finally "action". Shooting went quite quickly after that, and so did the days that followed.

The cast looked right and I continued to be "busy", helping with art department - a bit optimistic in light of the job the environment has already done, it looked great. Very impressive or strong, with character.

I returned after a stint in the production office - with contracts and negotiations - my home trip, then back to the office.

### **Monday, April 9, 2001**

The third last day of the shoot, and in some ways one of the biggest: our furthest location from base (24kms) on the worst road; 15 extras brought in from Alice Springs; and a complex couple of scenes, with lots of people, movement, tension, dialogue and action.

Turned out that the distance, and the state of the road, were less of a problem than at first thought, since a grader had improved it immensely over the weekend - travel time was consequently cut down to half that estimated.

The first, and major, task was to block the action. The Tracker and the Follower are escorted to a space at the base of a cliff, where the Fugitive is being held. Discussions take place, inspections, a spearing, an argument or two, and a retreat. On seeing the action played out, the next problem became how to shoot it...this was clearly the most under-scheduled part of the entire shoot, and how I thought that one day ought to be sufficient for it I'll never know.

But a day was what we had, with perhaps the chance to go slightly into the next. In the time available, I could think of only one valid approach: play the whole scene from the Follower's perspective, so that he was the observer of all the action. That way the camera became the stable point, in front of which the action plays itself out. Reverse shots of the Follower (at times with the Tracker, at times alone) would then also not be excessively difficult.

These things often hang on the degree of difficulty of a shot or shots, how many elements are packed into them. Complex action by performers is one element, extras are an element, focus another. If you start moving the camera, the co-ordination of these elements adds another two degrees of substantial difficulty: co-ordination of movement of camera with action; and co-ordination of focus between moving camera and moving subject.

I was initially tempted to bring the steadicam into play, but that adds a third degree of difficulty. At any rate I

felt the action in front of the camera, and how the Follower responds to that, were interesting enough to hold the scene. And so we began to shoot, in Damon's direction first.

David had quite a bit of dialogue, quite complex, and in at least three different languages. The presence as extras of Warlpiri and Anmatyere elders, including some quite famous ones (Johnny Possum, Ted Egan and others), added gravity to the situation for him, and he was extraordinarily focussed.

Instead of shooting being difficult as I'd thought it might have been, it was a pleasure...a great location (East Painter Gorge), an interesting scene, terrific extras and great performances by David and Damon.

By lunch we had everything, bar two shots, in the one direction. After lunch, as the sun had turned, we turned around and shot in the other direction...I'd already decided we'd have to come back tomorrow for the two missing shots, we were due to be shooting close by anyway.

In this second direction it was the turn of the elders, who'd stood patiently and done their thing out of frame all morning. The practice must have stood them in good stead, because the afternoon went as well as the morning had.

All-in-all we achieved more than I thought was possible. The whole two scenes (arrival, action and departure) were complete except for two shots, and complete in time for us to pick up one of tomorrow's scenes, a relatively simple walk through a creek bed.

Interestingly for me, I discovered later how caught up I'd been in the mechanics of the day. I saw some of the continuity photographs. The entire look of the scenes had escaped me, but when I saw these photos (pretty average quality digital stills) I was reminded of why we were in that location, why we had brought extras in from so far away. Against the ancient rock face, the ancient faces looked...awesome.

## **Tuesday, April 10, 2001**

It's extraordinary how the end comes so quickly...last week we were struggling with night shoots, the week before we were still dealing with horses (a distant

memory now), today we know that tomorrow is the last day, when this experience, which has been so much more than simply shooting a film for many of us, suddenly comes to a stop.

And the beginning today was a reflection of that...we had trouble getting away on time, and I went close to sleeping in for the first time this entire shoot, heading out to set with only the one coffee (instead of the customary two) under my belt. Hence yesterday's diary report is a day late, I didn't get up early enough to write it.

Eventually though, we all muddled to location, back at East Painter Gorge, and the day started well, with a one-shot scene (shot two ways) of the two remaining hunters being escorted down a ridge. Old Franky did me a favour by not wanting to walk the ridge without his boots...we placed him on one side of the wide shot, awaiting the others. Talk amongst themselves in language was encouraged, and when we rolled I was thrilled at Franky's calling out to the approaching party...it seemed these people from so far away truly owned the land they were now in.

Then back to the cliff-face location to pick up the remaining two shots of yesterday's scenes. First was David throwing the spear at the Fugitive's leg, the Follower watching. Without it being truly essential, it was a shot worth doing: a bag filled with sand was pierced through, testament to the ferocity of David's throw. Then the reverse of the departure, again making me glad we'd come back to do it.

The main scene of the day was set in a rocky little gully, quite tight to shoot in, of the Tracker and the Follower first being confronted by the local tribespeople. Again it was a question of everything in one direction first, then turn around and shoot the rest. We managed four shots, effectively cutaways, before lunch, then started again after.

Conditions were not simple: the gully was a wind-trap, through which the air simply howled...fifty metres away, just out of the gully, it was still. Nevertheless we had to continue, and we were now under time pressure, because the sun was unlikely to last in the gully beyond 3 pm. First up was the remainder of the confronting side. Simon from Alice Springs had been chosen to play the lead confronter, and over the past day and a bit he'd had his first proper exposure to film making, and the notion of

doing the same thing over and over again, for no apparent reason.

So he did things over and over again, splendidly. By the time we'd finished with him his arm was nearly falling off with tiredness, from the one-handed rattling of poised spear against woomera he was expected to do again and again...one of the many small acts of heroism on this film.

By the time we turned around though, we were truly running out of time, and it was a scramble to try and complete the rest of the scene. I was certain we'd have to come back tomorrow somehow, even though this and tomorrow's locations were about as far apart as they could be on Arkaroola.

The scramble does strange things, particularly to actors. They begin to deliver their lines faster, which you then have to counteract by taking longer to call action, and by saying it slower and more calmly. The other thing it tends to do is that it stops them from thinking about what they're doing, they just do it. This can, on occasion, be a very a good thing, and I suspect on this occasion it was. The performances were natural and fluid for this heightened situation the characters were in.

We stopped shooting only when the light would allow us to shoot no more, but I think we have the makings of a good scene (at least I hope we have). Then onto the final scene of the day, a scramble (of a different type) down a steep gully by the Tracker and the Follower. For this I now had more time than I needed, so it was embroidered somewhat with some long-lens closeups.

The day was done...Alice Springs extras finished on schedule, one day remaining to complete principal photography.

### **Wednesday, April 11, 2001**

The last day of shoot, and time, I guess, to reflect a little on what made the whole work in the way that it did: whether the film itself works or not is another question, but undoubtedly the process at least to this point has been a special one.

Firstly we've been extraordinarily lucky with the weather. This is a film with every shot an exterior, and so every shot depends on the weather. If we'd had a bad



run with the weather, we could have been looking at a catastrophe. This last night, the night after shoot completion, is an example. During dinner, on a clear and mild night, a strong wind blew up, which was still blowing when I got up this morning...these sort of nights are not uncommon, and were one of our great worries approaching the night shoots. If we'd had just one night like that, we'd have been in deep trouble. Two nights and we'd have been facing a disaster.

Almost every day was warm and sunny, ideal shooting conditions. I think the three worst days of weather we had were all Sundays. It's been uncanny, and it's had a number of effects...the light has been beautiful, therefore the film looks more beautiful; it has been pleasant to work in, and therefore we do better work; it has allowed us to stay on schedule, hence unshot material is not compromised through added time pressures.

Secondly the land itself has been an influence, on cast and crew alike. Numbers of times people have talked about the "privilege" of working here; "what a drive to work in the morning" was a common refrain. We felt good about being here, and many are reluctant to return to the land of mobile phones and traffic lights (I have not heard a phone ring for almost two months). The actors, in a landscape such as this, could feel their characters the better, the situations were more real, the performances therefore (hopefully) the more convincing.

The cast itself I've probably written enough about...they rank equal with the easiest and the best I've ever worked with.

The crew, because it was small and a high proportion of them had worked together before (more than a third of the crew were survivors from Bad Boy Bubby almost ten years ago), not only worked very well together, but got on with each other much better than a closed situation like this might lead one to expect.

I'm sure there were many other factors, but these four seem to me to be the main ones.

Onto the last day, further out on the high ridge than we'd been. I'd not been out there for over two months, and the chosen locations were almost speculative. We had our first hiccup for the day when we overshot our first location, the place where the vehicles were to be parked (there is almost nowhere for vehicles to park or to turn at this end of the track. We had, in convoy, almost gone

past the point of no return when this was discovered, and luckily found a spot where a road-building bulldozer had made space to turn...with careful manoeuvring all vehicles were able to fit and to turn.

The point of no return was Siller's Lookout, the end of the track, a spot perched high up a steep incline with almost no room to turn one vehicle, let alone six. People took the opportunity to walk up and look out, and came back charged with the spectacular view...it was a sort of fortuitous mishap.

Finally found where we were meant to be, and shot a scene, in the most glorious surroundings and light imaginable. Then a long move for camera (but not for actors) as we did a scene of small figures in a large landscape. Lunch.

After lunch onto the final scene to be shot for the film, which involved a trek into the valley for cast and crew, then a trek out for crew as cast were to stay behind, for yet another epic shot. It turned out we were forced to do it easier than that...the way down was simply too steep and dangerous to consider, so we cheated the main part of the scene on an opposing ridge with easier access, then had the cast (down to Damon and David at this stage) walk a much longer way to the originally chosen spot.

It was another indication of how the landscape affects us...having seen the difficulty of their proposed walk, one might expect the actors to do some even good-natured objecting, but having sensed what the shot would be, they were more concerned that we mightn't go ahead with it because of the difficulty of getting down there. As it was, our last shot with actors was a grand and glorious thing, a fitting way for them to end the shoot.

Then two little pickup shots and the shoot was over, and all the joy and sadness that goes with the completion of a process like this burst forward. Every single person was still talking to every other person, and that in itself was quite an achievement.

This will be the last diary entry for ten days or so. I'm taking a week off, and will resume for post-production during the following week.

**PICTURE EDIT**

**Thursday, April 26, 2001**

Back in the office today for the first time in two months...strange, bizarre even. A mountain of paperwork - scripts and the like that have come in, accounts to be paid, letters and emails to be answered, people asking for jobs, actors sending in CVs asking to be considered for The Tracker, people asking for money, all of this so noticeably absent from the shoot.

And the phones! This office has five desks in it, each with its own phone. After not having heard one ring for so long, it seemed today that they were all ringing at once, all the time. But today is an ease-in day, prior to beginning serious work on the film tomorrow.

Yesterday though (public holiday, no phones ringing) I saw the assembly of the film for the first time.

Whilst we were in Arkaroola shooting, the editing team of Tania and Sar-J (Nehme and van Gyen, editor and assistant editor) were in Sydney, watching rushes on the big screen (the only way to see them and know what's there), supervising their transfer to tape, digitising them into the Heavyworks (non-linear editing system), synching the sound to them and...editing them.

Editing during the shoot is essential, as we, on set, can then be alerted to any problems that may exist, shots that need to be redone, missing shots, anything that needs to be picked up while we're still there with the actors and equipment. Reshoots or pickups afterwards are prohibitively expensive on relatively lower budget films like this one is.

And I can arrive, hopefully refreshed, and sit down and immediately see the shape of the film.

There's little I can say about the assembly that I saw. It was the shape of the film, and it sort of played, but I haven't yet seen a single frame on the big screen (that starts tomorrow) and all I could see were these little pictures that I knew were going to be there anyway...the power of the shoot is still there.

Assembly screenings can, however, be very, very depressing. This one wasn't, so I guess that was a positive sign. It ran just under two hours, which, considering it was cut long, is not a bad length at all. It'll come down substantially over the next few weeks. Parts of it seemed to work. There seemed, on the surface, to be no insuperable problems, and there were none of

those embarrassingly awful moments that make you cringe with the regret of ever having started the project.

Tania and I had a long discussion afterwards, trying to find our way in to being able to fluidly talk about the film. I listened to the six prototype music tracks that had arrived, and that gave us more to talk about, me more to think about.

Too many issues came out of the screening for me to be able to consume in my head, much less write about them sensibly now. Those issues will be dealt with as we get to them, teased out, as we start tomorrow editing the film anew, from the beginning.

### **Friday, April 27, 2001**

Well well well well...something new, different and interesting. A neutral reaction after seeing the assembly, not quite the film I thought we might have had after seeing the first lot of rushes on the big screen.

Rushes were of scenes 2-17 (the material we were looking at cutting today), plus some stray shots from a scene deep in the film. They encompassed everything from the widest landscape to the tightest shot of fingernails, and were luminous. They cast a whole new light on what this film may look like, be like, read like.

They also taught me a lesson...no matter what the degree of difficulty, film rushes on location (as apart from tape ones) are almost as essential as having the camera there in the first place. The cost factor is an easy one to resolve...if you think you can't afford to have film rushes, then what you actually can't afford is to cut non-linear - you should be cutting on film instead (still a cheaper option).

There were bits that I saw in the assembly I would have approached quite differently in the cut, had I not seen the shots on the big screen. The final product would certainly have been the poorer if we'd cut it first and then looked at it on the screen, as so often happens these days, when "digital" seems to be simply another word for "good", no questions, no challenges.

So Tania and I sat down and started at the beginning, putting the opening sequence together and thinking about one of the crucial decisions to be made on this film. The script has written into it a number of subtitles and

intertitles in this opening section, and these were the subject of some comment from executive producers and the like (initial reaction: "Drop them, you don't need them, it's better to let things develop naturally without telling the audience before you start").

I could take this on board at the time easily enough. If we're starting with a song, which we probably should to establish the convention, then there's a danger of there being too much information, with the words of the song fighting with the words on the screen and both suffering.

During the screening of the assembly, however, I had cause to reconsider...there seemed to me to be a firm need to establish precisely what was going on at the beginning, to give the character clues indicated in the subtitling, so that the audience has a context for watching what they're watching. Without them, all one is looking at is a group of four non-descript but individual men roaming around the countryside, almost without purpose, without connection. With the titles the characters not only have a purpose, but the film has the beginnings of a narrative drive, of tension, and the simple act of observing the face of one of the characters (none of them speak until scene 17) has some real interest. I doubt the ability of any song to give us anything approaching that, nor would I like to rely on it doing so.

So now I must remember to apply lessons learnt from previous films - first, and foremost, before you start experimenting with anything in the cut, CUT THE SCRIPT. Cut the script exactly the way it has been written (apart from obvious terrible glitches), and work on this cut until it is working as best as it can. Then look at it, and only then start to make decisions that are substantial departures from the script.

By the end of the day, this was the position I'd come to...put the subtitles in (perhaps not exactly as written, but certainly substantially so) because (i) the structure of the entire film was predicated on them being there...much would have been written, hence filmed, differently if they hadn't been put there in the first place; (ii) it'd be unwise to tamper with the structure of the film without first seeing it the way it was intended to be.

**Wednesday, May 2, 2001**

Another three days of editing done, another three sets of early morning (0715) rushes. I always tell myself that post-production is the time I like best, but sometimes I wonder if that's true...in the case of this film, if the process continues much as now, I'd have to say it is, notwithstanding that we had a shoot that was about as good as it gets.

Watching the rushes on the big screen continues to be both a joy and a revelation, both of these because the material seems so much better than my expectations (formed in part by the video rushes of the shoot). Perhaps my expectations are simply too low.

That's not to say there aren't concerns. The editing of every second scene begins with me saying words like, "This'll be a tricky one" or "we'll have to cobble this one together" or "this looks good, but it'll be a scrappy scene". Each time, so far, I've largely been wrong, and by the time we finish a run at the particular scene I'm either quite or very pleased with it.

I suspect part of the "problem" is that I'm still 'looking outside the frame', bringing to the editing process the various difficulties remembered from the shoot, when we ran out of time and I had to compromise on this, or when we just didn't seem to be able to achieve that, or when I too late realised that I'd forgotten to get such-and-such a wide shot.

A case in point is a scene where the Tracker, for the second time, sees a bush black, and, contrary to the first time, he reports this to the Fanatic. I looked at the rushes on the big screen and, for a change, they were largely disappointing...not that what was there didn't look good, but there was simply not enough material, the walking shots were too short and David had had an off morning with dialogue (he'd been there in the part, but the words kept coming out wrong, and differently each take).

I remembered the morning, early in the shoot. It had been hot as hell in the dry sandy creekbed, we'd had technical problems with the steadicam, we'd had all sorts of other minor problems and we'd taken half a day to shoot the scene instead of the planned two hours.

That's how the rushes felt to me...technically problematic, scrappy in performance, inconsistent.

We started (as we usually do) by looking at the scene as cut in the assembly. It was of little help to me, I couldn't relate to it, all the problems I'd felt in the rushes seemed to be there in the scene. I then made my usual starting-off comment about having to cobble this one together, that it wouldn't be a very good scene because I'd failed to get the material to cover my intentions on the day.

This started a discussion between Tania and I about what exactly my intention had been (she has access really only to the script whilst assembling the film, the more subtle or changed intentions are usually simply in my head). I talked about the context of the scene, how it was really a companion piece for the scene earlier where the Tracker doesn't say anything when he sees a bush black, and how that meant that the Tracker really had to be aware before he said anything that the Fanatic, on horseback behind him, had also seen something.

And that was simply one of the problems, that the Tracker doesn't first observe the Fanatic before saying anything, and we'd probably then have to drop the earlier scene and lose, for a while, the strand of the Tracker holding back information, manipulating the journey, not being who he seemed to be.

Once she understood precisely what I was on about, Tania was a good deal less pessimistic than I, and we began to "cobble" the scene together. It was a perfect example of editor and director working together to achieve the same goal...as one of us would find something, that would allow the other to take it another step, which in turn would progress the thinking of the first.

Sounds woolly, suffice to say that the scene is there, in a fair semblance of the way I'd intended, and it's much more alive with the personalities of the characters and with the progress of the story than I would have thought possible.

#### **Thursday, May 3, 2001**

A day of lows and highs.

Started off well enough with rushes, then a lengthy discussion with Peter Coad (artist) about the first two or three paintings for the film. Peter comes to rushes early every morning and we usually manage to grab a few minutes to talk about what he's seen and about what he's

up to. Today was a bit more detailed, with small-scale water colour studies discussed for colour and framing, and talk about the process from here on in. Then onto the edit.

Yesterday's entry about cobbling scenes together became particularly appropriate today: we struck the first scene that not only looked problematical, but that in fact was (and still is, albeit in a minor way).

It was the scene immediately after the one described yesterday. The group of four move on, guns at the ready, in a more tense mode of tracking, prior to them arriving at the site of the first massacre.

Because of the order of rushes screenings (we screen in rolls of film, which doesn't always mean in order of script, in that the rolls tend to follow the shooting schedule more than they do the script order), we'd jumped across this scene and already cut the next. This morning we saw the footage of this scene, and went back to cut it now.

There were more takes in this scene than was usual in our shooting (not, in this case, because of the actors, who were fine), plus some reshoots. In some way we'd never really got on top of the scene, which ought to have been quite simple...no dialogue, the group of four travelling along the creekbed.

Nothing cut quite satisfactorily, nothing seemed to me to work very well, until we got to the point where I suggested we drop the scene altogether. Tried that, looked at the film from the beginning of that screen day, when the men rose at dawn, until the charge towards the massacre... didn't work, the transition between the spotting of the bush black and the massacre site was too sudden, the scene, even though it was little more than a travelling scene, was needed.

So back to the drawing board, a painstaking eking out of bits of takes that worked, bits of reshoot, until in the end the scene was "acceptable"...in the run of the film, it seemed perfectly okay, perfectly in tune with the rest of it. Maybe my expectations are too high.

Then back to the massacre scene...this is one that perhaps suffers from excessively high expectations, in that the shoot itself was quite an experience. But the shoot has no place in the editing room, and we're faced with making good footage (which doesn't always translate



into a good scene or a good film) live up to high expectations.

If there is any scene in the film that is well covered, this is it, and Tania and I decided fairly quickly that the best way to approach the cutting was for us to talk about it and for her then to have a go at it herself. As in directing, editing sometimes requires an individual vision for best results...I'd shot it with a vision but with flexibility in the edit, and it was now time for the editor to take over.

Late in the afternoon Tania showed me a "draft" of the cut, against one of the first rough pieces of music from Graham (Tardif, the composer). It was enough to allay any doubts about the scene: it will work, is working, in every way that any of us had ever hoped or expected.

At the end of the day we discussed the scene further, some thoughts I had about the scene as it played...the Tracker perhaps appeared too interested in what was going on, the Follower needed a softer moment before he came in hard. But these were details, to be refined by Tania tomorrow.

Two other things came out of the day. One was the frustration of being out of the editing room when a scene you know you've done well is being cut. But that's a question of choice, of thinking about how to serve the film best, and this afternoon that was to sit and catch up with office work.

The second was just a moment in a single shot of all the shots we dealt with today. It was a closeup of the Fanatic (not Gary, but absolutely the Fanatic), looking up at...at somehow himself. There's a grin of sorts on his face, unlike any grin I've seen before, but a grin of the sort I'm sure has been seen by victims over centuries, the world over. Extraordinary.

### **Friday, May 4, 2001**

A continuation of the massacre scene, and our first serious exploration into the nature of the music for it.

We've been using one of the prototype songs so far delivered by Graham (rough instrumentation, a distinctive instrument instead of the voice), the one that has the most upbeat tempo...the script specifies an upbeat song, which is meant to act as a sort of counterpoint to the

nature of the scene, take the edge off it but leave one shocked at the end nevertheless.

The music we're using is not written to go here, but I preferred using it to temporarily using an already recorded song...there's a great danger in becoming attached to unavailable music, and then anything the composer presents not being good enough. So in some ways it is better to use one of Graham's pieces in a spot it was not written for.

Besides, the scene largely worked, even with music that wasn't yet right...I felt there was too much "mood" in the piece, perhaps too many minor chords which underlie the action rather than play against it.

We had come to the point, however, where we needed to discover more about how the scene would play, and therefore it became appropriate to look at it with some different styles of C&W songs playing underneath it.

We tried it with ten or fifteen different songs from a compilation double album...as we tried more and different things, my heart began to sink. The closer a song was to my original vision as to how this would work, the less it worked. The scene stopped having meaning, stopped communicating any sense of itself.

Lots of justifications possible...the words were wrong, and that was the problem; it hadn't been composed specifically, and that was the problem; the scene hadn't been cut to any of these songs, and that was the problem. But after fifteen songs, the reality of the problem seemed to be: (i), words of any sort were a problem; and (ii), upbeat songs of any sort were a problem, the more upbeat, the greater the problem.

There was salvation of sorts and some relief in the last song we were to try. It was slow, not upbeat, mixed instrumental with words more, and it certainly, for me, began to allow the scene to work again.

A couple of things had become clear though. We'd suddenly learnt a lot about music (in particular, not to take for granted whatever theories I might have). And we needed to get Graham down (from Sydney, but he's somewhere near the Burmese/Thai border as I write) as soon as possible, let him see the assembly and what there is of the next cut, and sit down and talk for a day or two.

**Wednesday, May 9, 2001**

Too busy for a few days to get one of these written...two days of "normal" editing Monday and Tuesday after our usual 7.15 rushes screenings, an attempt to start writing another screenplay in "spare" time, and the first of two intense days with Graham Tardif, the composer.

The two days of editing Monday and Tuesday were uneventful, with little to distinguish them in the memory from hundreds of days of editing on all the films I've ever done post-production on. I dimly recall an intense amount of work on the scene where the pack-horse is speared and plunges over a cliff, and that the amount of work it took was a function of two things...one was a wrong body orientation from David causing the geography of the location to become confusing (hence we had to try and find a way to cut around that), and the second was the sheer volume of shots, to be used in tiny pieces and quick cuts, to be put together.

Wednesday morning was spent dealing with the music and assembling the film so far. We tried the prototypes of the songs in a few different places, then Tania cut the rest of the assembly onto what we had cut so far. Graham arrived from Sydney, and we went fairly immediately into a screening of the cut to date.

I felt much more than I had felt the first time, most of it good. Part of the reason is that the first third or so has improved (as it always would), that the pace of it is much better and the scenes largely appear to be working as they should, making it much easier to read certain connections between scenes, much easier to read why characters respond to situations in the way they do. Another part of the reason is that I've been watching rushes on the big screen, and am consequently much more confident with the very degraded image coming from the editing machine.

I suspect a third reason is much more difficult to take into account, and that is, I felt much closer to the material, felt some sort of ownership of the scenes we had cut together, as opposed to the same scenes as they'd been cut in my absence. Some scenes had been barely changed, a few not at all, but they all felt better not only in context, but in themselves.

It is at times like this that I wonder about the haphazard nature of making films, how little we know in a theoretical sense about how and why things work or don't

work, or why audiences like or dislike (as a whole) one or another way of doing something.

For whatever constellation of reasons, however, I've begun to feel things from the cut, and I guess that's a pleasing thing (although even that is not so simple).

Then we began to discuss the music. My instinct was to put Graham through a similar journey to the one Tania and I had had the previous week, play numbers of songs up against the massacre scene and see where that led us. That's how we started, the same batch of songs against the same piece of film.

But Graham has different sensibilities to either Tania or myself, and the situation was different, in that the exploration was a formal one as opposed to the informal one of the previous week. The first song stopped proceedings for a good fifteen minutes as we discussed what it meant to the sequence...this was a song we hadn't discussed at all last week (for the simple reason that it was the first of fifteen songs, none really discussed until afterwards, and, it being the first, was the one most easily forgotten at the time). Oddly enough, this first song became a reference for the music in the film.

After going through and discussing maybe eight songs (the other seven had become irrelevant as a consequence of the discussions we were having as we went along), we stopped and took stock. The one sort of song that both Graham and I had been certain would work on this sequence was exactly the sort of song that was not going to work at all. At least we had something concrete to agree upon. Lyrics per se did not seem to be the problem (apart from the fact that I have still to write them and make them work), as much as tempo, tone and feel.

One has to remind oneself of the paradoxical nature of these discussions, in that whilst feeling you've moved further away from knowing what to do, you're actually closer to solving the problems, closer to knowing what to do (previously you just thought you knew what to do, you didn't actually know it).

We clearly needed to know more, so we repeated the exercise, with variations, for the opening of the film, another very tricky area musically because of the subtitles that are meant to set up the film at this point. Again there were surprises, but at least we felt we found a couple of options as to how to go with it, neither of them particularly close to the prototype song

Graham had previously sent. And, driving in the car that night, I considered a third option for the opening, and that was not to have any music at all over the opening.

The three of us had a long session that night at the home of Mark Kraus, the production accountant on "The Tracker". Mark is not only a good production accountant on the film, but he is very experienced and knowledgeable about the Adelaide music scene. Having played a lot (saxophone) and mixed a lot of music professionally, he knows a lot of good musicians, and has ready access to tapes and CDs of their work.

Listening to the individual work of musicians we may be using is another great discussion starter, and much of the discussion that ensued might have started with talk about the musician; it all eventually, however, evolved into broader discussion about the music. We were still defining and refining.

By the end of the day and night, we'd come to the conclusion that finding the right vocalist was the new priority. We'd come to the conclusion that, considering the images, considering what musically had worked and what hadn't, and considering the subject matter, the vocalist ought to be indigenous, preferably older and with a rough rather than a smooth voice (we'd come to the conclusion a long time ago that the vocalist should be male, and nothing that we'd heard up against image had yet convinced a majority of us that it should be any other way). Doesn't seem much in terms of conclusions, but considering the journey, it was a hell of a lot.

#### **Thursday, May 10, 2001**

After rushes (more nice surprises), a continuation of dealing with music.

Having made some progress the previous day with conceptual matters, we began spotting the film for song cues, working out where precisely we thought the songs should go. Graham and I had done this once before, at script stage, but with a cut to look at now, there were bound to be changes to original ideas.

This took until mid-afternoon. Each area where a song might be appropriate was discussed, and often we'd try something (either one of Graham's prototypes, or something seemingly appropriate from a CD). The nature of lyrics was discussed at times, the style and arrangement

of the band discussed in detail at each point. In this way we formed a coherent picture of how the songs would run through the film, how they related to each other, how the instrumentation developed (from a simple voice at the beginning through a full range of the band's instrumentation).

Individual instruments were discussed...where dobro, where Hammond organ, where acoustic or where electric guitar. The tone/mood of each song was decided upon (as best we could with words as well as with the real communicator, music itself).

We ended up with nine, maybe ten songs (the tenth will depend on the cut of a section deeper in the film, which Tania and I have not yet reached in our current run at the film). We worked out priorities and approach over the next few weeks, and where I could start to think about the words more specifically rather than generally (as has been the case to this point).

Then time for Graham to leave. Although the task ahead seemed to have become much bigger these past two days, that was only reality setting in. Despite that, I felt we'd made significant progress: I feel comfortable with the plans, confident that not only will this aspect of the film work (if I get the words right), but also that it will be special, a highlight.

Back to a different reality, the cut. The next scene was too big to attempt in what remained of the afternoon so we skipped it and went to a seemingly innocuous little scene we'd shot on the high ridge. It was (to me) over-covered because I'd had a little extra time, but what we'd seen that morning on the big screen, some very interesting reactions in some of the extra coverage, led to a discussion that should, perhaps, been had at script stage. It was to do with the character of the Philosopher, and the actual role he played in the film.

This dates back ten years, when I first wrote the treatment. My intentions at the time were for this to be a far more "intellectual" film, far more overt in dealing with issues, far more talk. In that conception of the film, the Philosopher's role was absolutely central, probably prime, up to the time he is speared. He was to be the voice of reason among warring factions.

As the script developed, and became a piece with the same story but very sparse of dialogue, it was the Philosopher's role that suffered most. The name

"Philosopher" (luckily not used in the dialogue of the film) has become a misnomer, and it took Tania taking on this issue that made me realise this was so.

We tried to work out who he really was, what he really represented, and what, if anything, he should be called in the intertitles/subtitles planned for the head of the film. "The Civilian" came to mind, and we decided to try and refer to him in this way for a few days, see how it sat, and to analyse what we'd done so far and were to do yet in terms of that now being the character.

After much discussion and little editing, and with the "simple" high ridge scene not yet started, we packed it in for the day.

### **Friday, May 11, 2001**

In some ways, I suppose, a "typical" day in the cutting room (what is meant to be typical I don't know, we don't seem to have many that are similar enough to call any of them typical), and certainly an illustration of what can be achieved, what problems can be solved, by the power of editing, if you have the material.

We had reached the scene shot by the waterhole (March 15 of the shoot, the scene that "began to flow..." after an inauspicious start to the day). Rushes on location had started to point to a small part of the scene being troublesome; the assembly confirmed that notion; and rushes on the big screen did nothing to allay my suspicions that this little piece of the scene was simply not going to work.

Just prior to being interrupted while cutting, I'd said to Tania that the best thing was probably to drop that little piece of the scene, easy enough to do considering we had coverage and the recalcitrant bit wasn't vital to the plot. When I returned from the phone call it had been done, and the scene as a consequence ran perfectly smoothly.

Some words from Tania the previous evening ran through my mind though, words about lightness and variation of tone within scenes being important where we could find them. I felt this might be a good test, and even though the scene was fine, we started again from the beginning, restructuring the shot sequence in order to accommodate a cut where the now missing sequence might work.

It was rather tense work...at times like this it's like a chess game for me and I'm tending to think two, three or even four cuts ahead. When I'm looking at a part of a shot (for a cut in the future), I sometimes want to see only that relevant (to me) part of the shot, which can make no sense to the person I'm working with, who is logically looking for the material for the next cut. Communication begins to break down, irritations begin to rise to the surface, until you stop and try and work out what's wrong with the working environment, fix it by talking it through and then continue in better humour.

We plugged away all morning and into the afternoon, recutting the scene, until gradually even the recalcitrant piece began to work. More refining, some slight changes, finally it sat (out of the context of a whole screening, admittedly) pretty well.

Then a graze over the scene thinking about the Civilian, who had, in terms of the drama, dropped right out of the scene shortly after the beginning of it. It was, curiously, actually helpful in this context to think of him as the Civilian rather than the Philosopher. Had he been the Philosopher we'd have been in a quandary about what to do with him throughout the cutting of the scene. As the Civilian, we could largely ignore him until we'd got the scene where we wanted it, then see where he'd fit in.

And fit in he did, in places the Philosopher mightn't have.

## **Tuesday, May 15, 2001**

An interesting last couple of days, nothing out of the ordinary but good scenes to cut...the night material from the third campsite, leading to the Tracker being chained for the first time, and the following day scenes where the party sets off again, finishing at the point where the Civilian (the Veteran?) is speared.

There's a good tight feeling beginning to pervade the film and it'll be interesting to see how much screentime we lose this cut (the assembly runs close to two hours). Nothing is being squashed, we're still cutting quite freely in that regard, but all the same the flow improves as we most often reduce, sometimes lengthen, occasionally just change.



The whole area of music goes haltingly forward. Mark arrived with some more demos (listened to and sent off to Graham), and he's also on the case with several possible vocalists. Instrumentalists seem quick to respond, vocalists slow: I don't know if that has any significance. Graham seems to have cracked the new music for the opening, should receive that Friday or Tuesday.

An even earlier start for rushes tomorrow morning...today we ran out of material to cut for which we'd seen rushes on the big screen. I thought we'd simply keep going, cut ahead a bit so to speak, but I found it almost impossible...the images aren't clear to me, they're not imprinted or saved and I have no connection with them. After a desultory half hour of trying we stopped for the day and concentrated on sound clean-ups.

#### **Thursday, May 17, 2001**

These days are nothing if not days designed to keep me deeply involved in this project, to the exclusion of almost all else. There's a complete mixture of things going extremely well and others with great promise but unpredictable result: if they go our way, we'll have something above the ordinary; if not, well, I guess at worst we'll have a noble failure.

The cut continues to go very well...the areas of unpredictability are the music and the paintings, both key elements in the mix of this film.

Wednesday morning after rushes Tania and I had a long discussion about the amount of tiny scratches on the film. This is much worse than I'd realised. Randomly, intermittently, worse in some places than others, there are tiny half to two frame scratches on the image. There had been communication about this during the shoot, but somehow the severity of the problem, and its potential to impact the cut and finished film, had not been clear to us on set (we never established where they came from, one day late in the shoot they just stopped appearing).

So far we've been able to easily cut around these, but this morning for the first time we were really quite limited in what we could do with a particular scene (luckily a minor scene, and it still works).

And this day we also began to deal seriously with the paintings. Peter Coad, the artist, apart from having been on location for the first four weeks, has been coming to

rushes every morning. After rushes we usually talk for a few minutes, he might show me some small drawings or watercolours of different ways to approach a particular painting, we discuss, he comes back the next morning with some more.

He's now progressed to the point of having completed some studies, a little larger, and in oils. At lunchtime I went to his studio with Geoff or Jeff (work experience high school student from Willunga) and a video camera, and photographed the seven that had been completed. Back at the cutting room Sar-J digitised them and we began the process of cutting them into the film, to begin to see how this might work.

A setback: where the images appeared on the television screen was not where they'd appeared in the viewfinder (something to do with a 16 by 9 aspect ratio conversion and my ignorance). We couldn't manipulate them into a matching-with-the-film position with the existing software on the editing machine, so after a lot of trying and messing we abandoned that attempt, figured we'd have to output them onto a floppy, get someone with photoshop to manipulate them and then feed them back in. It was disappointing not to have seen them in context.

This morning after rushes Tania and I got into another discussion about the paintings, and in that process cut them into the film anyway, despite the fact that their positioning was wrong and each cut consequently jumped violently. Surprise surprise, four or five of them, even though as studies they're in a relatively primitive state compared to their intended final canvas, actually did work in the run of the film (we think).

Small and informal though the occasion was, it felt like, no it was, a breakthrough. The great unknown of the paintings was somewhat less of an unknown, more of a potential. Equally interesting was how the ones that did work worked (different ones in their intended different ways), and why perhaps the ones that didn't (now "yet") work, didn't.

So many interests were competing for available time that we got through only about half the material we'd intended to edit today, but what we did manage was a joy...open conflict arising between the Fanatic, the Follower and the Tracker over the now injured Civilian/Philosopher (I'm not yet used to any change in naming). Dramatic scenes, good coverage, good performances, interesting cutting.

**Friday, May 18, 2001**

Spent the day away from the cutting room, dealing with Adelaide Festival of Arts business, but somehow, in a couple of small ways, this managed to be one of the more exciting days on this film.

It started innocently enough: a trip down to Camp Coorong for a launch to the media of part of the Festival program.

After lunch there was an outlining of some of the Festival Programs, during which I spoke briefly about "The Tracker", including a reference to the music.

One of the assembled multitude was an older Ngarrindjeri man, who thanked all for coming at the conclusion of the proceedings, then came over and sat with me and began strumming his guitar. "Can't sing", he said. He strummed on quite tunefully and I wondered. "We're too shy to perform in front of people", he added.

After a bit of talk and a bit of strumming I asked him (by this stage Neville) to sing me a song anyway, which he did, in a voice reminiscent of the great crooners, really almost the opposite sort of voice than the one we're after. "If you don't really sing", I said, "and you play your guitar around, you must know some singers." I explained in detail the sort of voice I was after.

He gave me some names of blokes with voices that might suit, and how to go about finding them. After a bit he sang another song...in precisely the voice I'd described. It was extraordinary, his own voice, without embellishment. I had to laugh. "You're auditioning, Neville!" He smiled sheepishly, half-denied it and we began to talk more seriously.

It was so unexpected that it took me some time to accept that this may very well be the voice we're looking for and to put to Neville the notion of him coming to Adelaide in a few weeks and putting some trial tracks down. Yeah, he'd be in that. "Ah, it won't work", I said, "you're too shy to perform in front of people." He grinned again and shrugged. "It's okay." "A thousand people?" And that grin again, "No worries." Never underestimate.

I felt an odd elation on the way back to Adelaide...another piece in the puzzle seemed to be fitting.

Back in town that evening there were two messages on my mobile from Tania. I rang. The new first piece of music had arrived from Graham, I should come in and see/hear it.

I did. Within seconds of the piece starting I felt the hair standing up on the back of my neck, and it sustained to the end of its three and a half minutes. Suddenly we had an opening, we had a musical blueprint for the film, we might also even have the required voice.

Though more complex in its construction than we'd anticipated (I'd had a long phone discussion about this with Graham some days before, when we discussed that the length of the opening might force us to adapt the plan we'd come up with when he was here), the piece was still extremely simple in its arrangement, dominated by voice with some sparse dobro and keyboard backing. It made the opening, but left plenty of room for the musical development we'd talked about over the next few songs.

It ended the week on a high, and it had been an important week. The two key "missing" elements, the two areas of unpredictability, the paintings and the music, were starting to fall into place, and working.

### **Sunday, May 20, 2001**

Repeated, repeated playings of the new piece of music, until I began to understand every aspect of its structure, every one of its subtleties. I'm almost completely illiterate as far as written music goes, so I have to work things out in my own way.

That means endless playings and replayings while I jot down pencil squiggles that rise and fall with the music, again and again until they're refined and resemble a followable structure of the piece. Then the lines of squiggles are eventually translated, into pum pum pom pums of various sort, until I can follow precisely what's going on.

In this case it's the words I'm working towards. If we're going to be recording some trial tracks with Neville soon, I have to get words written. These words had better be pretty close, or at least right in some way, or at

least not terribly wrong, otherwise we'll end up making cut glass out of these gems.

It strikes me that something unfortunate will happen out of this, and that is the beauty of the piece for me personally will be gradually squeezed out of it by the repeated playings. Normally on a film one hears the music over and over again, but often not until near the end, and nowhere near as often as on this occasion. So be it, maybe the recording of it with voice will so change it that the process can start anew.

After some hours, I'm starting to sing random words with the music...things begin to form, ideas start to flow, words are written down. Themes begin to develop. Then I stop. I'm putting the cart before the horse.

I realise I should go no further with this for now. I need an integrated approach to all the words of all the songs in the film. I need to work on all the themes simultaneously, work them all out, so that I don't use something in one song that ought to be used in another. So I stop.

Yet all day the words that came for the final chorus line haunt my thoughts.

## **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**

After Friday's excitement and yesterday's public holiday, much was expected from today. Rushes as usual (a little earlier than usual, another mix is starting in the theatre), then a bit of a discussion with Peter about the paintings.

The little discussion ended up being a big discussion. I don't paint, apart from rooms and hallways, and so I had a bit to learn about what was what...seeing that an aspect of the future of the film rested on how I (and hence Peter) dealt with what I learnt, I figured I'd better take my time with it.

The discussion stemmed from what worked and what didn't work when we cut the shots of the studies into the film. By going through them with Peter, in context, we'd both learn a bit more about the art of the other.

I'd worked out that in some way the studies were a little like Graham's music prototypes, in that they're there to present certain aspects of what's to come. This is fine, but unless you know which aspects, it's hard to know what

to say about what, what to criticise, what to discuss, what to wait for, what to trust.

This is my eighth film with Graham, but my first with Peter. With Graham I have a fair idea what to trust, what to wait for and what to discuss...with Peter I have almost no idea at all, so we talked in detail about all sorts of things: the figurative and the landscape; techniques of painting and how they affect texture; how abstract is abstract; precisely what the studies were to him, what I thought they might have been to me; colour and form. The discussion made a large hole in the morning, but filled numerous holes in my knowledge.

Then the supposed quick graze over the scene Tania cut on Friday in my absence turned into something more (it is, after all, one of the most complex performance scenes in the film, the one in which the Tracker is whipped) and it was well into the afternoon before we were into any new material. Forward momentum was not helped by a number of interruptions, not the least of which was a cost report meeting (such a different exercise of one's brain...one minute you're sitting in a dark room thinking about performance and drama, the next you're sitting in a bright room thinking about dollars and projections and overages and underages).

The new scene turned out to be a scene for which somehow we hadn't seen the rushes. By now I was getting a little anxious about lack of progress so we decided just to push through it, cut it now and see it later. But that's easier said than done when there are performance subtleties and insufficient resolution to see them. Onto the Steenbeck went the reels of film, spooling through manually as well as electronically to make things work. It all takes extra time.

By late afternoon we hadn't yet started on the material we'd seen at rushes that morning, so rushes for the morning are cancelled (I'm sure Bernie and Rory, the projectionist and the sound engineer, will appreciate the extra hour's sleep). We'd caught up to today's stuff by the time we stopped, and although there were times the day was frustrating, we dealt with some important stuff today, particularly this morning.

**Wednesday, May 23, 2001**

Inasmuch as yesterday was frustrating, irritating and slow, today was a joy in editing: smooth, fluid, constructive, enjoyable.

Not an early start because of cancelled rushes, but nevertheless well into it a bit earlier than we usually get started on the cut, and almost from the beginning things went well. We started by going over the last scene we cut yesterday, found a couple of little improvements, then continued on. First up was a night sequence, the fourth campsite, where the Fanatic helps the Philosopher (hard to get out of the habit) on his way.

The assembly itself was well cut enough, but I'd noted at rushes the previous day that I preferred a different take of the master shot of the scene, and that started an inevitable sequence of a complete recut (not that there are so very many options in this scene). We were both quite pleased at the end of it, the whole was just a little simpler than before, and ultimately seemed to me to tell the story a little better, in a slightly more focussed way.

Onto the next scene, the Tracker giving the Philosopher absolution and the Follower's reaction to that. We tried a few different approaches (about the one thing that non-linear is good for), and eventually found that once again, simple was best.

Onto the next scene, a moment's silence for the departed one, and this was a fairly simple question of dropping two shots from the assembly and shifting the position of one...nothing else needed doing.

The next scene was simply a choice between two takes (sometimes actually not so easy) and then working out how sound could enhance it.

Final scene of the day (and of the spool) was the indecision by the Tracker as to which way to go, a prelude to the big scene at the waterhole. This one required some serious discussion. The assembly scene sat very easily and coherently, but I wanted it to have a stronger Tracker point of view, which necessitated a complete rethink as to how it ought be cut.

After discussion I left the edit room to attend to other business (emails tend to collect, and today there were emails from various sources about each one of my previous films dating back to 1987s "Incident at Raven's

Gate"...these things never end) while Tania had a go at cutting the scene with the different parameters.

It wasn't so long before there was something to see, and what I saw was just about there...a couple of little adjustments and we were both happy.

This meant the spool was complete (each spool runs to about twenty minutes), so we looked at the whole of it before handing it to Sar-J for conforming (matching the film to the digital cut, so we can look at it on the big screen). The spool ran very well...a few adjustments to be made, a couple of scenes I'd like to get back into, but that can wait. We've set the screening date for Friday week, and hence we now have a fairly tight deadline to work to.

### **Friday, 25 May, 2001**

Thursday and Friday...two of the more difficult days of editing on this film, but then things have changed since the creation of a real (and tight, in terms of the pace we've been working at) deadline. Stress has made an appearance in the cutting room, resentment at interruptions, of which there are many.

And of course the material itself makes a profound difference ...sometimes in the nature of a scene, sometimes in how it has been covered on the shoot.

The big waterhole/stunt scene is an example. It was a big scene to shoot, complex action and stunts, and to get it in the time available there was little opportunity to shoot coverage or alternatives...just shoot what you absolutely need and hope it cuts together. And so the editing goes along specific lines, and the nature of problem solving is not, "what alternatives are there?", but "how can we make this problem bit work?".

Two other factors (apart from interruptions) contributed to a generally higher level of stress.

One was that a sequence of shots was not behaving for no apparent reason, until we suddenly realised that we'd shot some of this stuff in slow motion at a time when we were shooting with two cameras and only one was capable of proper slow motion. The mixture of speeds was what was upsetting things, a problem largely (and constructively) solved by slowing down the real time shots optically (although the effects of shooting slow motion and slowing



action down in post are different, it still worked better that way than mixing speeds).

The second factor was the underwater material. After some time editing this material and feeling ready to explode, I realised I was holding my breath whenever underwater shots were playing on screen (a sort of bizarre method-editing, I suppose). I'd check it, relax, but find myself doing it again within minutes. Gave up on that one, just pushed through until the actors were back on dry land and I could breathe normally again..

The scene is cut, and works I think, but more than the previous material, will benefit from a revisit after the screening. And that's how we really have to think over the next few days, to make the deadline...if it's working okay, leave it alone (if we can bear to - occasionally things are working but we both still want to attack them).

Then today a truly wonderful set of rushes to begin the day, where the Follower deposes the Fanatic (plus some great looking but pretty dodgy rushes of the following scene, the aftermath of the second massacre). The rushes were such that there was a great energy to get started, but circumstances were against that.

Paintings had to be dealt with, in that Peter has been doing more detailed studies (in order to better satisfy the doubters, I suppose), and also had some new material that had to be discussed. Then the editing machine was caught up with working out what material had to be sent off to be optically slowed down (from yesterday's editing). Then a new piece of music arrived, for the first massacre, and that became the immediate priority and then, and then and then...

Three hours after we might have started editing, we finally did start, and a lot of the energy had dissipated. Not long into the scene, however, and the actors took over: our energy returned. Gary and Damon are so good in this scene, David so good in the next, the assembly so close to what the scene should be, that we made rapid progress.

School duty (flute lesson, minky) took me out of the equation for a couple of hours late afternoon, but we'd discussed where to go with the massacre aftermath sequence, the one that, in terms of coverage and shooting difficulties (see March 28, the afternoon shoot), is probably the most troublesome in the film. Having seen

the digital assembly, and having seen the rushes on the big screen, I still did not know if this scene would cobble together, let alone work as well as we'd initially hoped.

I came back to an almost completed sequence...and it felt almost wonderful. A couple of minor changes and we were there. Somehow, on the day, I must have made some correct decisions in all that scramble, because ultimately the material was there to draw the emotion in the way intended. A little miracle...

Then we pushed on, despite not having seen rushes, because there was little choice with the time available (the absolute latest we can cut and still give Sar-J time to conform is Wednesday).

Deep into the evening we completed the run at spool 4, and sat back and watched it. One minor change and that was it, ready for conforming over the weekend. It played pretty well, despite not having quite the amount of time spent on it as have the first three spools.

Finally a long phone conversation with Graham about the new piece of music, how it worked and how it didn't yet work, very satisfactory in the sense that we still seem to be speaking exactly the same language, and understanding where what is coming from.

### **Monday, May 28, 2001**

The pressure is on now. This being the third last day of picture editing before our screening, it has become a question of prioritising rather than working through all the material (although most of it will have had a thorough working through by due date).

Rushes and painting discussions to start with as usual, then into some interesting material, the Tracker preparing to put the Fanatic on trial.

I was shocked to discover that the first (and by far the best) take of Gary's four minute monologue was somehow damaged in the middle...broken sprockets (with a couple of missing frames) and a deep, deep scratch. I ask myself how this can be so, and can find no logical answer, and no time now to find out (and any point?). Disappointing, and I now understand why it wasn't used in the assembly, something I'd wondered about but hadn't come round to asking about.

It's not that the alternative takes are bad (in fact they're quite good, exceptional except by the standards of take one), it is that the first take is (was) special. Money could fix it, but to have the entire four minutes put through the CGI process to restore the two missing frames and fix the scratch would cost more than we can spare, and at any rate even if we had the money it could be more fruitfully spent in other areas. Simply not cost-effective when the alternatives are good.

And the scene works well anyway, seems very strong to me (I start to sit on the fence somewhat as a screening approaches, a lot of "it seems" rather than "it is").

The other major work of the day was on the second last scene of the film, wherein the Tracker and the Follower part ways. Here came to the fore one of the enduring mysteries of film-making for me: how can two people (in this case this editor and this director) who can agree about so much to do with performance, have such diametrically opposed views about another piece of performance?

The mystery will endure, but I suspect that at the end of it both editor and director were relatively satisfied with the result.

### **Wednesday, May 30, 2001**

Our last set of early morning rushes today, and, shortly thereafter, a lock-off of this run at the picture. We have a cut, so to speak.

Yesterday was heavy, the long, complex scenes shot on the third and second last days of the shoot with the extras from Alice Springs. As the shoot was complicated, so was the edit, but for different reasons. Primary among them is the reason of the missing shot.

During rushes in the morning I already realised there was a shot missing...not missing from the rushes, but a shot we'd simply failed to shoot, one that should have been shot to help make sense of the scene. It can be a nightmare scenario, and usually there are enough people around to make sure it doesn't happen, but in this case we simply didn't have anybody doing continuity, and there was always a risk that something like this might happen.

Once back in the cutting room we went over and over the rushes, trying to work out how to get around this problem, just sort of trawling for ideas. Solutions came

(but none as satisfactory as going back and shooting the shot, which may still happen), and we carefully cut our way around the problem, emphasising this a little here, skating over that a little there, so that eventually the scene worked without the shot. It was a little more "lateral" than it would have been, but some people like it like that. It ought to play, but we'll see what happens on Friday at the screening.

[An interesting sidelight to the promulgating of these diaries...kept personally, I may have talked about the missing shot in detail. Here, I can't, because it would prejudice the information I may get from the screening.]

Then another difficult scene to cut, every shot with a different amount of wind behind it, from the violent to the gentle. It's very difficult to find flow in a scene like that, and this one's a prime candidate for dialogue post-synching.

Today only a little remained to be cut, really only the scene where the Fanatic and Follower return to the hanging tree and find the Fanatic gone. It was a simple scene, but a number of different options were possible. Complicating everything was the need to cut round a particularly heavy set of the one frame scratches that seem to occur randomly through the film.

Another piece of music arrived, and, as is our wont, everything was stopped to deal with that. Receiving and fitting fresh music is about our favourite activity in the entire editing process, a delicious sense of anticipation, sometimes completely fulfilled, sometimes partially, sometimes disappointing. This was the second piece of music in the film, for the continuation of the trek on the second morning, and it didn't disappoint us. In its prototypical state it already seriously enhances the sequence...properly recorded, with voice and words, it should be terrific.

The cut completed for now, we turned our attention to the sound, going through each reel and adding or making modifications in preparations for Friday's screening. This, more than anything, is a case of prioritising, of doing only what's necessary to allow the film to flow and make sense at the screening. There's months of work ahead on the sound, too much effort in that area now will only reduce the amount of time spent on other essential elements.

**Thursday, May 31, 2001**

There is usually a frenzy the day before a screening, and today was no different. The more people (apart from those working directly on the film) who are due to come, the more of a frenzy the day becomes, as attempts are made to make the screening as good as possible by working on the film until the last possible moment. And there seem to be quite a number of people coming, despite our best efforts to keep the numbers down.

We started the day by completing the run through the film for sound, making small fix-ups on the remaining spools to ensure a smooth flow. Interruptions seemed to come at a faster pace (as they do the day before a screening): our potential vocalist Neville, who Celia was to pick up from Camp Coorong today, phoned and said he was in hospital, regrettably unable to make the screening; the lab phoned about the slomo opticals, they'd have to be sent same-day (with added expense) rather than risk them arriving too late tomorrow morning; a local distributor/exhibitor rang, having heard there was to be a screening of footage, could he come to the screening.

So the fixups took a little longer, especially the final dealing with music. We'd found a happy second home for the piece that arrived yesterday...as a temporary indication, it was a lovely way to end the film. Then we grappled with the first massacre music. The piece that had arrived last week didn't really work there, and had been put into two other spots for the time being. Graham was hoping to have a replacement piece done, but in a call yesterday he wasn't so sure he was getting anywhere. So we mucked around with the piece to which the sequence had been cut, one of the very first prototype songs, now stylistically quite superseded.

Enough was enough, there was still much to be done. Tania had now to mix the eight tracks of sound on the Lightworks down to 2 tracks on a DAT tape, a fraught procedure because it has to be done in one run, of about twenty minutes per spool. Make one mistake and the whole spool has to be started again, or you have to live with the mistake. There's little time for subtlety. It's an imperfect system, but a good deal more presentable than when cutting on film, when usually you have just two tracks of sound to begin with (there are those who argue, with some justification, that it's better to cut the image and make sure it works in story-telling terms without any reliance on sound...I'm not sure I agree, because sometimes you shoot stuff to work with sound in a

very specific way...without the sound working, the cut simply doesn't yet work, and there's no way of knowing, apart from blind faith, whether it ever will).

Each of these spools then has to be transferred onto 35mm mag tape, being monitored at all time to check for faults. This is done in the mixing theatre, and the transfer job was not quite completed before a fellow Festival film currently shooting, "Deadly, Unna?" were knocking on the door wanting to see their rushes.

Meanwhile I'd received a call from Graham. He felt he'd cracked the music/song for the massacre, and would bring it with him on the flight from Sydney in the morning (I know these things can be sent on the internet, but we're not quite that technical yet). That meant he needs to have someone waiting at the airport to pick him up (his plane arrives at 8.30), rush him and his disc to the office, the music has to be digitised, fitted, the spool has to be mixed down again, re-transferred and re-synched, all before ten in the morning when the screening is due to start. Absolutely no room for error or late planes.

I left the office late, and Tania was still there checking synch, while Sar-J, who'd already spent long hours single-handedly conforming the film, was fitting the just-arrived opticals. Two spools have to be retransferred in the morning (we're using recycled stock, and there was a substantial dropout on one spool which couldn't be fixed before the rushes screening of Deadly Unna; the new music accounts for the other spool). We'll see how it goes.

### **Friday, June 1, 2001**

The chaos continued into the morning of the screening: the sound output from the Heavyworks had a problem, in that there were random "glitches" seemingly caused by a synch chasing problem; the plane from Sydney with the composer on board carrying a piece of music (to be placed in the cut before the screening) was late; the recycled mag stock we were using for the screening was causing the odd dropout which then required the spool being re-done; a normal pre-screening.

In the end the screening started only five or ten minutes late, thanks to the herculean efforts of Rory (assistant mixer) and Tania. A fair explanation to the audience was in order beforehand, as there were many more people there than I would normally have had for the screening of a

first cut, but most were either entitled to be there or were there for good reason. Some were inexperienced at screenings like this, or didn't know the script and hence would wonder what all the bits of black represent (paintings).

It was, for example, the first we'd seen of our future musicians. In selecting them, we'd listened to their work, and hence knew a bit about them. They knew nothing about us or what we were really trying to achieve, so for them to see the film seemed to me to be important. The post-production crew need to see the film as they go...apart from morale and commitment and "owning" the film, it makes communication so much the easier afterwards.

Jonesy flew down from Sydney. He'd seen almost nothing of what he'd shot on anything but video, which, for a cinematographer, seems to me like seeing nothing at all. Then there were various representatives of various funding bodies, each of whom has a perfect entitlement to see, and be involved with, what's going on.

One can argue that a bigger audience is so much the better for a screening, but my experience with this sort of thing is that a slightly bigger audience of this type is simply slightly more dangerous. Usually the response within the cinema, the breathing/laughing/crying response from an audience such as this, is not at all representative of how a "normal" audience responds.

And on this occasion, this may or may not have been the case. The screening audience was almost completely silent for the entire 99 minutes. Mostly there was not a sound, not a movement. That's the other thing...an audience at a time like this also feels inhibited by the fact that it is a working screening, that people like Tania and I are trying to work out for ourselves how the film is flowing, where things are slow, what's working, what isn't yet.

Each time there was a sound glitch I winced, and wondered what others made of it, to what degree had they been thrown out of the experience of seeing the film. It was, therefore, only an average screening for me, because I certainly was thrown out of the film a number of times. But then I suspect I would have been anyway.

On an intellectual level the film was almost precisely how I expected it to be. Mostly it worked pretty well. There were areas that need tightening (as expected), areas that need more work (as we knew), but mostly it

runs well and coherently. On an emotional level I was less sure: there were too many glitches for me to get involved on that level, too many people being too quiet for me to be able to "feel" the film.

I didn't learn as much from the screening as I'd hoped, but I learnt possibly the most important thing...it's playing. Those who had had the least to do with it appeared particularly impressed, but even those with important stakes in the film seemed very pleased (I say "seemed" with the greatest respect to those I spoke to afterwards - over the years one learns a natural suspicion towards any comment, particularly general positive comment, after a screening such as this).

And clearly the film delivers something. It's very beautiful, sure, visually arresting - but not at the expense of the drama. It's deemed to be powerful, which I guess means that it delivers on an emotional level. The characters, good and bad, are engaging, their relationships are complex enough to be interesting, clear enough to forward the narrative. David, Damon and Gary all shine. The music, although in an early stage, shows signs of being a highlight (along with the number of other highlights).

And the problems? Ah, we start working on those Monday morning (but there aren't too many, nor do they seem very big).

## **Tuesday, June 5, 2001**

Two days to come to some sort of terms with what information the screening on Friday brought to light, two days of discussion and fine cutting and theorising.

Monday was a day when nothing very concrete seemed to have been achieved, but when we nevertheless laid the groundwork for many of the decisions to come. We attempted to begin fine cutting spool one, but interrupted ourselves with discussions about broader issues so often that very little cutting was actually done.

We had the longest of discussions on the first painting, first Tania and I, then joined by Peter for quite a while. The script, as originally written, has the first painting starting the film, but forming on screen from a blank canvas. This is technically not so easy, but possible.



It occurred to me however, that a tricky, say, three day shoot (it would have to be done by shooting single frames) may very well leave us with a piece of film that doesn't at all work. That possibility then started me thinking about why it was to form on screen in the first place, what had I had in mind when I'd written it that way.

It all led into a quite theoretical discussion about the meaning of art in general (quotes from Paul Klee included) and the meaning of the paintings in this film in particular. If there was a result of this discussion, it was that the representation of the process of painting was no longer appropriate for this film, the way it was turning out...all we'd be doing is creating a smart-arse opening title shot that would mislead the audience into thinking they were going to be viewing something quite different from what would actually follow.

Then, of course, it became a question of working out how to begin the film instead, firstly, painting or not painting, then, if painting, how to deal with it on the screen. The decisions here were: yes, painting; and, deal with it as simply as possible. So at least we had a start, and we mucked around with the opening for a while.

Having achieved some semblance of a new opening, we viewed the entire spool and made notes on what each of us felt needed work, then compared notes and discussed. I had an engagement elsewhere, so Tania set to work tidying up the first massacre, something we were always going to look at once we received the actual piece of music for the sequence.

This morning Tania was still working on it, and eventually was ready for me to look at it. It was beginning to sit better, then some further work on it together, including again going through the original rushes and looking for possible extra snippets to use, and it seemed that that was about as far as we could go with it. There still seemed, to both of us, something lacking, but neither of us could quite work it out.

We viewed it a number of times, went back and forth over bits of it and came to the conclusion that it lost energy in its final quarter because it was cut much slower, on account of the action being more deliberate. One recut later, more cuts, and the problem was still there...it seemed to be sourced directly to the much slower action.

More thinking and spooling, and we decided to try something a bit more radical...pull to pieces what is really my favourite piece in the sequence, the third quarter, and redistribute some of the material into the last quarter (it is at times like this that the non-linear editing system comes into its own, because you can try something quite substantial quite quickly, but not lose the original version). We set about, in writers' parlance, "killing a darling".

Because there are a lot of shots in the sequence, this took quite a bit of working out to begin with, listing shots on paper, numbering them, then re-numbering them. Then Tania got on with the job of recutting.

The result was better, substantially better, but still the slight feeling of dissatisfaction nagged away. Then I realised that still the energy flagged at the end, but now for a completely different reason. The music had been composed to the version where the last quarter was much slower. Graham had had a lot of trouble with this piece, and it wasn't until he'd broken the piece up dramatically into four quarters and dealt almost separately with the music for each quarter, that he started to make some headway with the piece. Now we were in the situation of having a much more energetically cut last quarter with music to suit something much more sedate.

So on the phone to Graham, this third completely new attempt at the music for this section would have to be substantially modified. He understood, and before the afternoon was out we'd sent a new version of the cut so that he could compose to suit.

Meanwhile Julie was trying to organise our first rough recording session, to get a better feel for the music, to see how the musicians played together and, most of all, to test out Neville for his voice. That went less far than it might have...Neville is still in hospital (one begins to think, should we look for a replacement? Not yet, not yet).

After the climbing of these first two mountains (the opening and the massacre), the rest came easy and well. We worked through our notes on spool one, found a few more and completed the spool apart from the words at the beginning (another mountain, but two is enough for the time being).

**Thursday, June 7, 2001**

Another two days, difficult ones, and another spool fine cut. Thousands of words spoken, intense concentration on a video screen, long discussions, about characters and balance and identification, about paintings, about trimming frames, so many words that I have trouble thinking of any more to put down here.

Maybe the weekend will give sufficient respite for me to be able to deal adequately with the last few days...but pressure builds on the song words, more words. A recording sessions threatens, the singer hasn't got any words yet because I haven't written them. Maybe at the weekend.

### **Friday, June 8, 2001**

Wednesday and Thursday already seem like a long time ago, difficult to remember the details without spending too much time thinking about it.

So now we're onto spool 3 of the fine cut, and the pressure grows to write words for songs...a trial recording session tentatively planned for next Friday had to be postponed for a week because there simply isn't the time between now and then to deal with everything that has to be dealt with to make the effort worthwhile.

These mutually exclusive "needs" of a film are a common enough phenomenon, and it's usually a lack of time that gives them their mutual exclusivity. It reduces itself to having to set priorities, so that only some things suffer rather than everything suffering.

Schedules are the "cause" of these problems, schedules set by the amount of time that can be afforded on any particular budget. In this case we have a relatively generous amount of post-production time, but few people to do the work...hence the time is in most ways as pressing as if there was a lesser amount of time but more people working.

Tania is editing the picture on this film, but she's also going to edit the sound. If I'm not getting through the fine cut with her, then the completion of that will be delayed, at the expense of the sound edit...in the end everything is either a cost or a compromise, and one of the arts of film making is how best to choose between the costs and the compromises.

For example, we've found the musicians we want to use, but one of the key ones will be in London at the time of the scheduled final music record...to accommodate him, we'll have to record two weeks earlier or delay everything by three weeks. The delay we can't afford financially...can we afford creatively to go earlier?

We don't yet know if Neville is going to work as a vocalist, but we can't properly, usefully, find out until I've written the words to at least two songs. Unless we find out soon we're going to run the risk of getting squeezed for time with the music, but to find out soon means compromising either the picture cut or the sound edit to make the time to write the words. Negotiating our way around these conflicting priorities has been one of the pressures of the past few days.

In the end, the path seems clear...finish the picture cut first, so that the sound edit can begin (the sound edit requires less of my time). The aim is to finish the fine cut by next Friday, and have another screening on the following Thursday, then have our first recording session the next day. That way I'll have time on Monday week to go to the Coorong to deliver words and music to Neville and discuss what we'd be doing at the recording session, and Neville would get to see the film on the Thursday before the recording, and he'd still have had time to learn a few songs (assuming I get some words written by then). Complicated, but quite simple.

More scheduling will have to be done...Peter is about to start painting the large canvasses, and we'll have to shoot them when they're done to put them into the film. When that happens, we'll take the opportunity of the gear and Jonesy being here to go off to Arkaroola and do a couple of pickup shots. But the cut is meant to finish next week, so we'll have to estimate the lengths of what remains to be inserted and do fixups on the sound later, an unfortunate amount of extra work when one person is doing all the sound editing.

The fine cut itself seems to be going well enough. Small things sometimes make quite a difference, at other times we seem to have been working for hours refining, then look back at it and find there is no discernible difference made by what we've done. Sometimes there's a difference all right, but it's hard to tell whether it's better or worse.

None of this is very specifically about anything we've been doing, but we're now into such detail, and covering

such an amount of territory on a daily basis, that to describe the detail would take pages...no time for that, not much interest in that either. We've lost a little screentime since we've started fine cutting (almost a minute from spool one, over a minute from spool two, about half a minute from spool three so far) although we're not hesitating to make things longer if that suits.

A long weekend coming up...time for a bit of recovery (and maybe some words...).

### **Wednesday, June 13, 2001**

A full-on few days: much grappling with words for songs over the long weekend, concentrated fine cutting since then.

How do people go about writing song words? This is a question that has concerned me somewhat for some time now. I guess there are many different ways, but it seems to me I've picked a tough area to test my skills, words for songs to be used effectively as incidental music in a film.

This is not as straightforward as it might be. In the first instance, the music is written first (something that Graham and I decided way back in pre-production would be our method, music first, including song melody lines, then words to fit the song melody line). But, as we've since discovered, this song music can't be just song music, it has to have something in common with film music, it has to fit a mood or feeling or intent pretty precisely, and often in very precise timing. So not even the starting point for the words are in any way conventional.

Then it gets almost worse. The words should in no way describe the action on screen, that'd be not only self-conscious but bad film-making, like having characters talk excessively about something they have just seen or done, something the audience has also seen.

But although the words shouldn't describe the on-screen action, nor even refer to it, they should still fit well with whatever is happening on-screen, or at least the mood of what's happening. For example that staple of song writing, the love song, is completely inappropriate at any time during this film. Other topics may work in one section of the film, but not at all in another.

What seems important is to have in the words some sort of reverberation of a general or distant theme of the particular film sequence to which that song is dedicated. The line between what is a reverberation, what is obscurity and what is over-familiarity is also a shifting one, depending on the music, the sequence, even on an individual word.

I've had to find my own approach to all this, clumsy perhaps, certainly time-consuming, but, with any luck (and sufficient diligence), effective.

In each case I've already seen numerous times how the piece works musically with the image. That firmly in mind, I set the CD player on repeat (one song per disc) and play the song (on headphones) over and over again while I make little squiggle jottings that are a personal indication of lines and timing of the vocal melody line (generally presented on the disc by piano). In this way I have, in an odd and completely individual way, a sort of music to read (I can't read conventionally written music and I think it safe to say that no one else can read my unconventionally written music).

I then sit down at the piano (or with a little synthesiser toy belonging to one of my kids) and work out the real notes, writing them on the page as 'C' or 'F' or whatever they are, because by then I know the musical rhythms so well that I can hum/sing to letters on the page.

With a page of letters in lines in front of me, I resort to the headphones again, again playing the number over and over (occasionally I fiddle with a note sequence on the keyboard, as a sort of reminder that these letters are the song or to play and replay a particular phrase) and following the progress of the letters to the progress of the music.

Words appear in my head, or phrases, and I'll scribble them down in pencil just below the particular note letter or letters...a last word here, a repeated phrase there, a first word somewhere else...until some sort of thematic pattern emerges and I'm forced to start making decisions, like, "what does this particular song want to be about?"

Then the hard work begins, the joining of words and phrases to make sense out of them, the finding of appropriate rhymes, the placing and replacing of new words and phrases. Sometimes I'm desperate to use a particular word, it would make complete sense of a whole

section, but the word might simply sound wrong in the context of the music. Alternative words of similar meaning that come to mind might have too many syllables, or not enough, and I'm then forced to restructure the words, even meaning, of an entire section because one little word doesn't "sound right in this song".

I'm grateful in the extreme to Graham for composing music that I'm happy to listen to over and over again...it would be an awful task if I didn't like any particular song I was working on.

With a fine-cut deadline on Friday, a visit to the Coorong to deliver words and music to our possible vocalist on Monday, a screening next Thursday and a recording session next Friday, we have our work cut out for us. But at least we have the first result in song words...yesterday I emailed Graham a copy of proposed words for the first song, today he rang, having read them and sung them to his music, and declared they were as he'd hoped them to be.

And that's saying nothing of the fine cutting, which continues...

#### **Thursday, June 14, 2001**

Drawing towards the end of the fine cut, but still plenty of challenges and interests on the way...

Perception is a most interesting thing when editing especially with regards to performance. What I see is not necessarily what someone else sees, sometimes not even close, even though in a measurable sense exactly the same thing is coming from the screen every time. Gary's long monologue towards the end of the film was a prime example today.

On the shoot it was clear that the first take of the three was outstanding, the second much less so and by the third take Gary had run out of energy for it. During the edit the first take had not been an option, as the middle of it was damaged...two frames missing, some deep scratches on either side of the missing frames. Tania had chosen the third take for the assembly, but after careful weighing up of all the factors we'd gone for the second take in the more recent cut (although Tania still favoured the third take).

We reached that part of the film in fine cutting last night, and looked again at the first take, even though it

was unusable (a sort of fond, wondering "what if?" farewell, I suppose). We'd begun to entertain finding ways to cut to other scrambled together bits during the damaged portions, had even calculated how much material we had to find and gone looking for it.

We returned to it this morning, looked again at the scene as it was cut (having used the second take of Gary). I thought then about perhaps shooting some achievable semi-abstract cutaways (chain lying on ground? a piece of rope? hands fiddling?) to get around the problems of the damage in take one. As we prepared to look at cutting take one in, and to see if we had enough material to cover the damage, Tania mentioned that she still liked take three (and that Sar-J liked take three and that Rory liked take three). I hadn't at all thought of that, because two weeks ago I'd carefully and exhaustively examined and preferred take two over take three, and I liked take one significantly over take two, and therefore take three wasn't an issue any more.

Time to make time, back to square one and look at all three takes (easy enough with a normal shot, not so easy with a four minute shot you'd expect to use almost all of). Look at take two, then take three, then one, then look at them all again and it was clear (to me, in that moment) that not only was take three significantly better than take two, but it was also probably better than take one.

What happened? Had the film changed? (Yes, but I doubt that was the answer). Had my perception changed? Probably. Why, what caused this? Don't know...anything from getting out of bed on a different side this morning to sufficient distance having been put between me and the filming to a better understanding of the character dynamics running through the film. Or maybe I was just stupid last time. Who knows anything? What is objectivity when judging performance anyway?

Meanwhile the paintings have been quietly making progress in Peter Coad's studio. A flying visit today, 12 large canvasses at the correct widescreen aspect ratio, all with charcoal outlines on them. Not much to say, an early part of the final process, but a realisation of scale. Peter had felt much the same thing when he'd photographed his final studies and projected the resulting slides onto his studio wall...there is something about the scale of these paintings that will add substantially to the effect. And when they're on the big screen, twenty metres across...



A fair bit of fiddling with music this afternoon, partly exploration, partly dealing with the duality of almost any screening. Screenings are meant to be, first and foremost, about those of us working directly on the film being able to make judgements on what to do next on the basis of having seen a run of the film on the big screen and learning something from what other people might see and feel. At their best they can have a slightly experimental feel to them, you can try things out without fear of failure (something you try might fail, but the film, unfinished, does not fail yet).

The screenings almost always turn into something else as well, and that is almost at cross purposes with the first intent. The screening becomes a chance for worried (or not so worried) executives to see how their "investment" (in whatever form, financial, future work, past work, responsibility, whatever) is going. That doesn't bother me so much, they're entitled to see it and since I haven't finished it yet, I'm generally not too concerned by what might be said about it. What does happen though is that some of what you end up doing when editing is (consciously or unconsciously) with half an eye on the upcoming screening.

Something like what to do with music is especially relevant here, music making such a difference to the flow and sense of a film. Late this afternoon we spent half an hour with a piece of music (one of Graham's song compositions without the melody line, therefore more moody than melodic), trying it in slightly different positions, cutting and joining it in quite complex ways, until I realised that despite the rationale (read, rationalisation) that we might learn something, it was really to do with the screening, to give those who might be seeing the film an experience as close to the finished film as we could manage.

It's hard to realise at times like this that we are less than half way through post-production - we're already starting to behave as if the film is almost finished, worrying away to an arbitrary and artificial deadline to provide a cheap thrill when so much will be affected by what is yet to be done. I shake my head in wonder at my own behaviour sometimes.

**Monday, June 18, 2001**

Not much to write about, all I seem to be have been doing is writing a few words to a few songs. Not strictly true,

it's just that I have to stop and think about what else has passed.

I vaguely remember Friday, finishing off the current cut of the film. I remember us doing something small but good with the final image of the film, which felt a bit overblown as it was and almost repetitive of how the previous scene ended. I'm sure we did a lot of other things on Friday, but this is the only one I remember at short notice.

The weekend was odd. A cold/flu hit Friday night (other members of the family also afflicted) so it was a stay-at-home weekend, good word-writing conditions. This I attempted to do, despite the fuzzy head. And in the end it was not a bad way to spend a weekend, endless repetitions of music, a word here, a word there, a line develops, a theme, other lines, slowly the thing builds. By Sunday night songs #3 and #4 had words (of sorts), and at least I was ready to see Neville at the Coorong.

Today dominated by the trip down to see Neville...turned out his hospital stay had been caused by him running bodily (on foot in the bush) into a kangaroo, or perhaps equally, a kangaroo running into Neville. He (Neville) was quite recovered. We went through the songs together, and the words, and I left him to his task of learning.

Then a quick drop-in to the Adelaide Festival office to invite those appropriate to the screening on Thursday and to discuss preliminary ideas for possible premiere venues (nearly nine months away, but already taking some of our time: Julie and I between us have checked out no fewer than four possible venues so far).

Back to the office to tie up loose ends, Tania attempting to dump out the sound without the glitches of the previous screening...and not having much fun with it. And this diary entry was only made possible by me forgetting the CD with the next song on it, so no song word writing possible tonight.

## **SOUND EDIT**

**Tuesday, 19 June, 2001**

A whole day spent going through the film with Tania and James Currie, deciding what dialogue post-synching is to be done. And we're not yet finished, more of the same tomorrow.

Although I once made a film where every word was post-synched, I generally don't like it and try and avoid it where possible. It tends to sit less easily than location-recorded dialogue, although I don't know how much of that is getting used to the location dialogue as you cut, and how much of it is actually the new dialogue sitting less easily.

Another problem I find is when trying to post synch just a word or a line in a scene...attempting to make that sit naturally during a sound mix has proved frustrating and less than satisfactory in the past. The only prevention is to post synch the entire scene, but often there's some little gem of performance you consequently lose or a quality of the scene that can't be recaptured.

In this case we were a little more thorough than has been usual for me. Each line, each word, was listened to and weighed according to three basic criteria: technical acceptability; intelligibility; performance.

Almost all dialogue was recorded using both a radio microphone and a boom microphone (each giving a substantially different sound feel), these two tracks laid up in parallel for the cut. Often when something was technically unacceptable on one of the tracks, the other track would be fine, and so on this level of the recording we had very few problems.

Intelligibility is a whole other problem, and a can of worms on this film. Generally the problem in judging this is that we know the script, we know the material, and of course we can perfectly understand what such and such a character is saying. So we have to second-guess whether an audience will, or will easily work it out by context.

Here, however, we have two further problems. One of them is, will a foreign English-language audience understand this? When the tracker says, holding up a rabbit, "White fella bush tucker Boss", and when he says it fairly quickly, will the audience understand or not understand because of the vocabulary or because of the particular enunciation? No amount of post-synching is going to fix the vocabulary.

Exacerbating this problem is the very nature of the tracker's character. There is supposed to be a very substantial difference in how he speaks English at various times, from his (for the character) normal fractured English/almost pidgin, to a clear "Queen's English". If we make all the fractured stuff clear and

easy, then the difference between that and the intentionally clear dialogue will be insufficient to get the point across, to create the shock when the character suddenly reveals himself to be not who he seems.

And then you get performance, when by post-synching you can sometimes improve or change an actor's performance, and since performance is such a subjective thing, this too can be hard to make decisions upon.

So it was a long and not so easy day, plenty of scope for disagreement about all things except technical acceptability, on which count we would mostly defer to Jim's judgement. Sometimes one wishes that all things were technical...

### **Wednesday, June 20, 2001**

Tomorrow's fine cut screening is becoming bigger than Ben Hur...ten people from the Adelaide Festival of Arts coming (as they should...they, after all, need to understand what they're dealing with in the context of the whole festival), some people from the Department of the Arts (including, probably, the Minister herself), Neville Gollan from the Coorong for his first look at the film (to be followed by the recording session the next day), three from the recording studio, a few of the shooting crew and assorted others.

It's an easier atmosphere though...we know that the film plays and that what is to be seen tomorrow is really not so different from the film we screened a few weeks ago. It's a little shorter (about five minutes), a little tighter, a few try-outs, a little more music. There was more time between when we finished cutting and when the screening is, Sar-J is on top of the conform, Tania ironed out most of the sound glitches during the sound dump-out and all in all we're just better prepared. We'll see...

Completed the post-synch spotting in the morning, re-arranged reels for music cross-overs and did some minor picture trims in the afternoon (ideas that had come about as a result of the post-synch spotting), talked about sound editing procedures and organisation, worked out budgetary aspects of this, ran through the film and accurately measured and counted opticals and worked out the budgetary implications of that. A clean-up day.

**Friday, June 22, 2001**

Another lifetime since the last entry. The second screening only yesterday, seems much longer ago than that.

A lot learnt from it, most of it good. The film still plays, probably a little better, but the largest effect of the fine cutting has been on the character of the Tracker. After the previous screening, I felt this character was the one in dangerous territory, despite David's strong performance. Because of his (the character's) largely passive and observational role, he felt in danger of being irrelevant at times, of disappearing in taking note of what was happening on the screen.

That seems no longer to be true. I didn't feel we had done a huge amount to address this problem (we tried more things than we finally put into the cut), but the difference is stark...the film now is really "The Tracker", and David strides centrally across the canvas of the film. Very pleasing.

Very pleasing too was audience reaction. The majority of people either knew little about the film or were completely unused to ever seeing a film that was not yet complete, were not part of the film industry. For the first time there were laughs (where they were intended, although sometimes no laughs where there were intended to be laughs), and the final reaction seemed to be universally positive. We're almost there with the picture cut...more questions had been answered than new ones posed.

Then today our first music record, and the trying out of Neville. The setup was long and arduous, as the recording studio had just moved to new premises and not everything that they thought (and wished) would be ready was. This might have caused some uncertainty among the musicians, because it took some time for them to warm to their task, even though all had seen the film at least once and knew what they were there for, and were there because they wanted to be there.

Neville too had a hard time of it. His voice does indeed have the quality we were looking for, but he'd had insufficient opportunity to prepare (the aftermath of his kangaroo collision still taking up a lot of his time) and he didn't have the depth of experience to make up for this in ways that a seasoned recording singer would.

Everything was new to Neville, everything had to be learnt for the first time, and that too was a struggle.

I realised during the session that I should have spent much more time with Neville beforehand, but then again, I was under time constraints as much as Neville was. The real question is, how much difference will spending much more time with Neville make? Enough? Not enough? Something for me to think about over the weekend, because the voice that comes from him is certainly interesting.

So we achieved a lesser result in actual recording terms than we might have from the day, but we learnt probably more than if the session had gone reasonably smoothly. And by the end of it we had no real doubts about the capabilities of the musicians, and that's a real step forward.

### **Friday, June 29, 2001**

Time to go down to the Coorong and talk to Neville. Graham and I have discussed the issue at sufficient length...yes, there's a quality about Neville's voice, and yes, if we had lots and lots of time, we may be able to make him work, but at this stage of the film, and with live sessions coming up, Neville is simply too great a risk to take.

Julie and I drive down to the Coorong, gives us a chance to catch up and talk, something we haven't really had time to do much of since before the shoot. We get to Camp Coorong, Neville's not back yet from taking a tour group out. After some waiting, it looks like Neville may be quite late, so we head back. I'll have to come down another time.

The next day Neville rings and I think hang it, I'll go down now, so once again I embark (alone this time) on the 2 hours plus drive down to Camp Coorong. This time Neville is there. I speak to him for half an hour or so, tell him it didn't work out the way I'd hoped, he takes it well, understands our crazy way of dealing with time (we don't have any of it, whereas Neville is time-rich, and probably the better off for it).

Tania and I decide that we should just pass over the film once more, taking into account our thoughts and the feedback from the most recent screenings. We begin at the beginning...and are trapped by our own intention of making this a thorough last pass until paintings and

music. We are confronted immediately with something we've forgotten, or perhaps avoided: the whole question of the text at the beginning of the film.

No choice but to deal with it. The non-linear editing system we're using at least allows us to work with words on image, but it's a fairly awkward procedure, very time-consuming, archaic in computer terms. By the end of a whole day at it we're only partly into it, still in no way certain of how it's working (our approach is also non-linear, hence fragmented until the whole is there). We are to continue Monday, until I remember I have to go to Sydney Monday afternoon (AFC business), back Tuesday night. So not until Wednesday next week will we begin to know much about this.

Then a trip to Peter Coad's studio, see how the paintings are going. A dozen large canvasses litter the room, all with tremendous amounts of colour already on them. A few are downright exciting...although semi-abstract, I recognise the waterhole, the line of hills, from the first massacre location, but it speaks to me differently than do the images we captured directly onto film. This truly is a great unknown, how these images will sit with our images. At least I can feel the promise.

### **Saturday, 7 July, 2001**

A week since the last diary entry, the longest break since I began. The discipline has lapsed a little, particularly as I drift into areas that have little to do with the film.

Monday night in a hotel room in Sydney I tried to write the words for song #9, the sun rising behind the hanging tree. Graham had supplied a new version, and I was determined to crack the words that night.

I must have played the song around sixty times. At almost four minutes each time the song played, that was four hours of the same song, over and over. At the end of it I could have listened to it another sixty times (I like the song a lot), but there was little point...I'd managed just seven words in all that time.

Tuesday was Australian Film Commission business, back in Adelaide on Wednesday. We were meant to be having a four week break but there's no stopping Tania. More music had arrived so we spent the morning with that, fiddling with precise placement, making the odd, tentative, picture

cut, then letting go a little. The time away from being constantly with the film allowed some perspective, and we explored some areas I would not have thought of otherwise doing.

We cut a little into the sunrise hanging shot, then moved the music further forward and cut even more into it. It still didn't sit quite comfortably, so we moved it a long way forward, over the scene where the Tracker puts the Fanatic on trial. This had two effects...one was that the hanging shot was cut radically now (the last part of the song still had to match the following scene, where the Follower wakes to see the Fanatic hanging there, so it was the sunrise shot that had to be reduced in length) and the other was on the "trial" scene: it had lost a little of its raw power, but somehow that seemed right; it was less overt, more subtle, more about the whole than about the detail, and the David's performance seemed less demonstrative. And it was certainly less didactic. Not finished with this one yet, we'll probably get back to it next week.

Thursday was back to the beginning, and the slow process of trying to work out the text. Each attempt at superimposing a line of text, or a different positioning for a particular line, takes some time, so it was long, slow process. And here too we were a little braver than before, cutting into the previously sacrosanct opening sequence, seeing what happened if the music played until a later stage in the opening, again something we would not have thought of doing had not we given ourselves the time to think about it.

In the meantime Julie was out checking venues for the premiere, and chasing our choice of a vocalist for the songs. The venue hunt might seem premature, the premiere is eight months off, but with it being part of the Adelaide Festival, these things do have to be sorted out well beforehand, or we risk missing out on a decent venue altogether. The vocalist is becoming more urgent...I've decided I want to do a temporary record with him to the guide tracks, so we can see sooner rather than later what the words are doing to the film.

Friday again the beginning, and a "draft" we're happy with until we get the song with words. Then a quick pass over the remainder of the film, a few smaller points that had come from the screening over a week ago. A trim here, a tuck there, until we reached the Fanatic's long monologue.



The screening had disappointed me here, and I felt we should go back to take 2. I looked at take 2, shook my head, and felt we should do what we could to make take 1 work, damage and all. I'd shot nothing to cut away to, nothing which would easily adapt itself to allow us to skip across to another take, so again it was a question of manufacturing something. It was a little tricky with the Tracker's passing in front of camera at odd times (and at different times during each take), but I think ultimately we got there. Again a bit of preciousness (not cutting into the take was, in hindsight, simply preciousness) had been overcome, and hopefully the final film is a little the better for it. It is a very clear illustration of the tension between art and commerce...time, which costs, is often the key to improving a work.

Some word on our preferred vocalist (no names until it's agreed) came through, a likelihood of a yes, and again I start to be under pressure for the words. Today was a not very pleasant Saturday (weather) in Adelaide, and up early for another go at song #9. Family quite bemused to hear me randomly wailing during the day (I was under the headphones, so I did not consider myself to be wailing, but I'm told the effect from outside my head is less pleasant than the imagined effect inside my head). Finally, 8.30 at night, I have the song...I think.

### **Sunday, July 15, 2001**

Another week has passed us by, almost unnoticed except when carefully looked back upon. Many small things have happened or have been done which, when all added up, denote progress, but taken individually, make it feel like very little.

We've gone as far as we can go with the picture cut without having the paintings and some version of the songs with words. Just prior to getting to that point, Tania and I made a few more little discoveries, particularly near the end of the film.

We'd cut a sequence the way it had been written and shot, and used some temporary music to fill it out (a walking sequence). There was something a little odd about it, but we'd always let it through. This time we didn't, and worried at it. First thing we tried was dropping the first scene in the sequence, which certainly improved it (was this simply because there was less of it? I don't think so, there was something about the sequence of

landscapes that hadn't been working). This led to a different way of looking at things, and the next thing we did was change the music, try an entirely different feel, dramatic and foreboding rather than open and "beautiful".

The effect was immediate and dramatic. Suddenly the sequence felt as if it belonged, as if it had some purpose. We could now entertain putting back a different shot that had previously been dropped, because it might enhance the sequence rather than dragging it out. And even that went into a different place, becoming the first shot in the sequence instead of appearing somewhere towards the end of it. It was a good little discovery, and tapes of the recut (one with the temp music, one without) were immediately generated and sent to Graham...luckily he hadn't started on the music for that sequence yet.

The paintings are making steady progress (steady from an outside point of view, that is...from the inside it is probably a frenzy of activity). The backgrounds of the twelve paintings within the film are just about there. The figurative sections are being filled (by now have been filled) preparatory to painting.

The words to another song are written, and Graham is working on the incidental music. Julie strives every day to bring us some progress on the negotiations with our choice of vocalist, but the headway being made is slow and tentative, a function of another contract being negotiated for the same singer.

Facing the fact that it may be weeks before we know for certain who the vocalist is going to be, a different temporary solution has to be found for the songs-with-vocals need that we have. Enter one Owen Love, unit on the shoot and a fair singer to boot. We'll record temp tracks to Graham's recordings with Owen.

Owen is away next week, but has left with the words to five songs and the music for ten songs. On Tuesday week we'll record with him, lay up the result and start to be able to see where we are with this.

Plans for the shooting of the paintings, particularly the first and the last, advance slowly. The first and last paintings have yet to be started, because they're a special case...each has to be a match dissolve with an image (the first and last) of the film. These days CGI is the answer, if you can afford it. We can't, so we'll

bypass the digital age and try and do it in a crude but effective fashion.

Our problem is that the film has been shot in anamorphic, so there's no way to project, with accuracy, a frame of the film onto the canvas to allow Peter to paint the landscape such that it will dissolve precisely. Talking first to Tony Clark at Rising Sun (we've made four films together) and then to Robin at Cameraquip (our shooting equipment suppliers), we figure the best way to try and do it is to put the particular frame of the film that has to be matched in the gate of whatever 35mm movie camera we'll use to shoot the paintings, with the same lens attached, and try and project a lightsource through that onto the canvas...that way the image is unsqueezed by the same lens that will be squeezing the image of the painting onto film. Hopefully next week we'll start to nut that out in a bit more detail. Judd Overton, the camera assistant on the shoot, also happens to be Cameraquip's Adelaide rep...he's just come off a shoot and is now casting his mind to the problem.

Friday morning was potential venue inspection time. Julie, E.P. Bridget Ikin and I, along with some Festival people, had a good look at the old Her Majesty's Theatre as a possible venue for the premiere of the film with band. In some ways it is less than ideal, in other ways it works very well. Still a lot of thought has to go into this - no venue will be ideal in every respect, and we have to be clear about what's important, both technically and from an event point of view. A test is to be run in the next few weeks to see how a film screens there. We'll know more then.

Song words continue to plague: now the second song is proving to be stumbling block for me.

**Friday, July 21, 2001**

The third week of our "hiatus", and the quietest week yet. A diary entry seems necessary...word from readers comes occasionally to wonder if it's being kept up to date. Some progress has been made this week, with painting, song words and planning.

What feels like the biggest achievement was to work out a schedule for many of the rest of the things that have to be done during post. Next week we sort out the equipment and then test the projection of frames onto canvas when the camera arrives, plus we record the temp vocals of the songs. Early the following week we project and Peter will draw the image that has to match the film image. He'll then have more than a week to do the last two paintings.

Early the following week we're scheduled to go back to Arkaroola for the two pickup shots...leave Monday, shoot Tuesday, return Wednesday, shoot the paintings Thursday. That's assuming Noel (the Fugitive) can find Uncle Billy okay (Uncle Billy is suffering a family bereavement). The following week we start post-synch dialogue, first Gary, then Grant, followed by Damon. David, much more difficult to organise, will be here the following week for his post synch.

It's a plan, a schedule, and the whiteboard with the next six weeks of activity is suddenly looking crowded.

The paintings are progressing well...some are almost finished and look powerful. According to Peter it's a question of knowing when to stop (he says himself he doesn't always know when to stop). The colours are really starting to bring the canvasses to life, and I suspect we'll all stop worrying about how this aspect of the film will work soon enough.

Nine of the ten songs have their words now complete, subject to major (or minor) revision with time and when we record seriously. The tenth song has to wait, for length, for when we know how long the end credits will run. It's a huge load that's been lifted, and the hiatus is starting to feel more like a hiatus. We're still doing quite a bit, but little of it under any sort of pressure at the moment. That's not just a relief, but also a sort of recharging.

A trial screening has been scheduled for next month at Her Majesty's. I'm as much interested in the function and capabilities of the projector (and how it might otherwise

be used in any sort of location, interior or exterior) as I am in how it performs at this particular venue. Other screenings for the Festival are planned, some in the country, and this is something we'll have to eventually deal with. The trial screening next month will start us on the road to dealing with those technicalities.

Still no definitive word on our singer, but it seems to be edging closer. Julie has been hard on the case of that one, a little frustrated that we can't yet pin it down, having implications as it does on budget and schedule. Still, most other aspects seem currently under control, so we can afford to run a bit closer to the wind with that one.

### **Wednesday, July 25, 2001**

A bit more serious activity for a couple of days...Tuesday recording Owen singing the words to Graham's guidetracks, Wednesday quite a busy day with a variety of stuff.

The recording session was at least interesting, not always easy but very instructive.

Somehow the first fifteen minutes or so were the best. We'd decided to work through in order the songs that Owen had had in advance (five of them), then if there was time left, see if we couldn't get through the other three that he hadn't seen before.

So we started with song one, the opening of the film, and quite quickly I was hearing something of what was intended by the song...and I had a quite unexpectedly emotional response. Certain aspects at least of these songs were going to work, you could hear that much from a rough recording from a temporary singer.

The idea of using an Indigenous singer was something that very clearly felt right, and certainly will make a difference to the feel of the film for Australian audiences. How the actual songs will work with the visuals remains to be seen, but as far as I could imagine standing listening in the recording studio, at least some of it was going to resonate very well.

Owen sang his way through the list of songs...some worked better than others (without their visual references), but I was beginning to see how much work was going to have to be put into the recordings later to get them right. The

nuances seemed critical, and even though Owen knew the film and had had the songs for a week, the time available was only enough to get it down in some barely acceptable form (I guess I should have known...why else can it take weeks to record an album that plays for forty minutes?)

Towards the end of the day we'd worked through all eight songs I had words for, and I'd learnt something else...even with good guide tracks and printed words, it's not so easy for a singer to work out exactly how the words ought be sung (i.e., how they fit to the melody). Owen had had to do some figuring and make some choices, and some of the choices he'd made might have worked for him musically, but they didn't necessarily work for clarity or understanding. To then have to unlearn how to sing it according to the way he'd been rehearsing was not easy; it was also time-consuming (which, in studio rental terms, is expensive).

So after Owen had left I thought I'd better provide a more accurate guide track for whoever is going to be our vocalist (and that's another story). The only way to do this was to sing the words myself, and record that. Todd (Telford, the studio sound engineer who I'd worked with as an actor in 'Bad Boy Bubby') after an initial laugh or two set to the task of trying to make me sound half reasonable ("Don't worry, I'll stick on a ton of reverb..."), and we threw down some very rough recordings. I won't comment on the quality, I haven't heard them back, but I think they'll do the job.

Todd will edit Owen's tracks for temporary laying into the film, and we should very soon learn even more about this music and these words.

Today Jim and Tania and I started going through the film for post-synch sound effects, what we wanted or needed to enhance the English language version, what would need to be done to create the M&E (Music and Effects, all the sound except for the dialogue so that foreign languages can be dubbed onto it). It was a slow process, we'd completed less than two reels before lunch when I was interrupted by the arrival of Judd (camera assistant), with whom I then began to sort out gear and strategies for projecting images onto canvasses, this now to take place next Tuesday.

Later in the afternoon I went round to Peter's studio, to check on progress of the paintings. The twelve large canvasses littered around the studio are impressive...I look forward to seeing them on celluloid in the film.

Then finally we got some word through on our potential vocalist...he's likely to come and see the film early next week, at which point we might know something more. Fingers crossed.

### **Wednesday, August 1, 2001**

A few days away from it all at the Melbourne Film Festival for "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories", and some serious issues confront upon returning.

First and foremost are the songs. The recordings made with Owen last week were in the cut, and it was a confusing array of material to look at/listen to. How much to keep the faith? How much to panic and change all our plans?

It started well enough...the opening number with vocals mostly worked, even a little better than expected at this stage, and seemed to sit fine with the text. This was pretty encouraging.

With the second number, immediately the words seemed wrong...the nature of them, the placement of them, just about everything about them. But this was a song that Owen hadn't received beforehand to learn, he did it just at the last moment, so how much of it could have been that simply the interpretation of the words was not yet there? The further we went into looking at this stuff, the more I had my doubts.

The third song wasn't altogether bad, and one could imagine that with time and effort, it could be made to work...proper translations into language, time and effort on interpretation, tone and pitch (pitch was a real problem with all the songs...how much of what I felt was wrong was due to the pitch problems? How could I tell what was causing what?).

And even the fourth number, although it felt wrong, could be seen to have a fair chance of working, but once past that, five six seven and nine all felt terrible, enough to make one think of giving up this having songs caper once and for all. But again, the (at this stage) unanswerable questions, how much of these problems were caused by the words, how much the song to begin with, how much the particular singing of this song and these words, how much due to my tiredness after some long hours in Melbourne?

We're committed in a way, but we can't be committed at the cost of the film. I now feel immense pressure about this, but perhaps I shouldn't feel any pressure at all, perhaps there isn't even a major problem, just a few little ones that can be overcome by the process.

Then straight into attempting to project the opening and closing images onto the canvasses at Peter's studio, and that didn't help my peace of mind any either. From the start we were beset by unexpected technical problems: the tests had failed to reveal that the whole image could not be projected fully through the gate of the camera at any one time (you had a choice of either the top two thirds or the bottom two thirds); what could be seen through the eyepiece was not necessarily the same as what was projected through the gate; focus difference between projecting and shooting was such as to create quite a difference between the two images.

Judd, Peter and I fiddled and thought and tested and theorised for a few hours, Rose fed us, we fiddled some more and eventually settled on something that gave us what we thought to be the biggest chance of success. Thoughts of delaying and sorting it out very properly were dismissed as ultimately leading to too much expense, and I didn't want to start adding even more to the pressures of the budget, particularly being forced to keep in mind that the whole music area still had a long way to go.

Then this morning was oddly frantic, with more and more slight problems to be solved and small budgetary issues to be faced. Our "hiatus" is over, Tania and Sar-J are fully back on the job and there seemed to be an endless run of things to be dealt with. Noel has not yet tracked Uncle Billy down for next week's pickup shoot; technical problems with the video machine for the sound edit; reflectors required for the pickup shoot; can we solve the painting matching problem by getting the titles sequences done digitally, incorporating some small amount of CGI into that? Can we then afford to do that? How much will it cost? Who can know this? How long is a piece of string?

These and many other questions ought to be answered sooner rather than later, but tomorrow is out (I drive to Berri and back to pick up the potential vocalist, screen the film, then drive to Berri and back, total driving time, twelve hours), Friday I go to Brisbane for the Brisbane Film Festival, Monday we leave for Arkaroola for



the pickup shoot (if Uncle Billy can be found), back Wednesday night to shoot paintings on Thursday.

I shake my head. This is meant to be the easy part...

### **Thursday, August 9, 2001**

A somewhat chaotic week has elapsed since last I wrote...characterised more by driving in vehicles than anything else, we've nevertheless made substantial progress.

Thursday last week was vocalist day...drive 250 kms to Berri, pick up Archie Roach, drive back to Adelaide, screen the film, drive back to Berri to take him home, drive back to Adelaide. Archie came out of the screening rather stunned (I think beforehand he wasn't at all sure what he might have been going to get into) and his response was that he'd be privileged to be part of it.

It's a fair step forward. Archie is a beautiful singer, and as an experienced and popular recording artist (ARIA Awards and all) we can now feel very confident with both the soundtrack recording and the live presentations.

Monday morning was off to Arkaroola to shoot the pickup shots. Difficult to know what to do here...Noel (the Fugitive) had told us he'd find Uncle Billy, but we'd not yet received confirmation. The camera gear had been hired in, Ian had flown in, we had no real choice but to go and rely on Noel's word.

Late Sunday we learnt that Uncle Billy was very likely in Port Augusta, and we'd been given instructions as to how to track him down. So Ian, Beverley and Judd drove directly to Arkaroola while Chris and I went to Port Augusta to pick up Uncle Billy.

Easier said than done. The Indigenous Media Centre gave instructions as to who next to go to (at a clinic) and how to find them. At the clinic we were told that yeah, Uncle Billy was back, how to find his abode but he might be at the beach. We found his place (he's considered a "fringe dweller") and approached cautiously past the barking dogs. No sign of anything.

Wandered off to another dwelling, someone came out and said Uncle Billy was at Yatala, near Ceduna 500kms away. He'd know, he was looking after his dogs for him. Didn't

know when he'd be back, probably soon, he'd been gone a while since his wife passed away.

What to do now? If we went to Ceduna we were just as likely to pass him going the other way...no real option but to go on to Arkaroola, do what we had to do there whilst trying to track Uncle Billy down - hope he was on his way back to Port Augusta and find somewhere near there to shoot his shot on the way back to Adelaide.

So Chris and I drove to Arkaroola, picking up Noel at Nepabunna and arriving late afternoon. The others were already there, Chris and I continued on almost immediately to a location we'd shot at in order to record a very specific atmosphere, soft wind through a particular species of Casuarina, a lovely sound.

There was slight movement in the air, a little of that whispering sound, but I couldn't hear what I was recording because my ears were still ringing after driving for the best part on nine hours. I doubted there was much there worth using, so made another attempt early next morning in slightly better conditions.

Then off to East Painter Gorge to shoot Noel's shot, while Chris stayed behind to try and track Uncle Billy down. We'd worked out the previous night that if Billy was in Ceduna, Doug Sprigg from Arkaroola could fly three of us over to shoot, then fly us back to Port Augusta to meet with the vehicles which would meanwhile have driven there. It was a plan, and we'd already learnt that Uncle Billy was indeed reputed to be in the Ceduna district.

Shooting Noel's shot was uneventful, an anticlimax even, taking a bit of time only because cloud was dominant and we needed sun. We got the shot and were back at Arkaroola before lunch, to learn that a bloke in the Ceduna pub reckoned that Uncle Billy had got on a bus for Port Augusta the previous night but he couldn't be sure.

With no further way of confirming where Uncle Billy might exactly be, back towards Port Augusta we went. Chris and I had a couple of hours of recording to do with Noel (grunts, groans, screams and the like, difficult in the very windy conditions that now prevailed), so we ended up at Parachilna for the night. Next morning Chris and I went on ahead to try and find Uncle Billy while the others gathered materials (sand, pebbles and rocks) to create a matching creek bed for the shot.

Overnight Noel had organised for the extras from the first massacre to be waiting for us to record some extra sound we hadn't previously planned on. Uncle Ross was there, and he knew straightaway where Uncle Billy was...just down the road and available.

In between recording we set up for Uncle Billy's creekbed shot in the car park of the media centre. Beverley worked on Uncle Billy's appearance to match him to five months ago, we lay him down and arranged pebbles around him and hey presto, there he was lying in the creekbed at Arkaroola. The wonders of illusion.

And here I am writing this today in Peter Coad's studio while we're finally shooting the paintings, painting the paintings with light. They're coming alive, and it will be most, most interesting to see them in context on the big screen.

## **Tuesday, August 14, 2001**

I'm always under the illusion that things will get less busy once the picture cut is locked off. I'm almost always wrong, and certainly in the case of "The Tracker" I'm very wrong. Not only does the outside world (other projects, the future, the past) intrude more, but the actual amount of work on the film just changes focus...it doesn't get any less.

The shooting of the paintings went well. By themselves in the studio, they were...paintings. The moment they were seen through the lens they became part of the film. Peter seemed to be having a truly wonderful day. Months of working intensely and mostly privately and here we were acknowledging them with our own efforts to make them look as good as possible.

Whole issues of budget/music/album also started to dominate. As it seemed that Archie was a possibility, so the possibility of a meaningful soundtrack album came to the fore. Little shifts of the budget to eke out this extra or that extra, but eventually we had to face the fact that having an album, and doing it properly with Archie, was going to cost more than we have in the budget for the film.

Meetings with Mark Kraus, Julie and I to try and work out how this might have to be structured...research on album deals and album financing structures and album returns (they don't work at all like film), more meetings, more

budgets, more schedules, more structures. Do we do an album deal now (probably better not, it'll be hard to do a deal without a label understanding what it is that we really have here, and that won't be possible for another two to three months) or later (but later is no good to us in terms of raising the money now)? Where then do we access the money required to do this properly?

I have a (sometimes irrational) reluctance to go over budget on a film, so my first instinct was to try and interest an outside investor and restrict it to the album. What can we offer by way of returns? How risky would the investment be? What sort of deal could be constructed to satisfy both an outside investor and the investors in the film? A lot of digging, a lot of maths and finally something emerges. Feels good to me, everybody looked after fairly. Some investor possibilities also emerge.

But first option on this ought to go to the investors in the film, so a call to the major investor to discuss the issues. Now it seems likely that the film investors may in fact want to put up the money themselves and thus guard the possible revenue stream. See what happens.

And in between it all, other progress on the film. The first of our post-synching, with Gary Sweet. A joy to have Gary back and working on the film again, even though the session is shorter than planned because Gary is so good at this.

The foley (post-synch effects) is well underway, the reels completed so far have the right feeling...augmentation of sound without overwhelming the general sparseness we're after.

A mini-rushes screening...the paintings and the pickup shots. Projection difficulties leave me unsure as to what I've seen, but later, when the paintings are cut into the film (admittedly only on the Heavyworks), Tania and I are delighted with how they're working, truly delighted. Only one major unknown now...the songs with Archie singing them.

**Tuesday, August 21, 2001**

Another week has passed, and I'm struggling to think back to the beginning of it: so many bits and pieces but nothing coherently larger...it's an odd time for me in that I have time, but not for anything substantial - there are too many interruptions for that.

Both Damon and Grant have now completed their post-synch. Damon, despite having little experience, took very easily to the process. He's a drummer and so has a very developed sense of timing, and he's also very good at improvisation, and so it was hardly surprising that he's a natural. Grant, on the other hand, really has to work at the process, which he did. Little steps, but the results in both cases ought marginally improve the film.

Sound editing continues, not without its own dramas. A day and a half was lost through the Fairlight (computerised sound editing contraption) spitting the dummy. Lots of diagnosis, the problem became bigger and bigger until in the end it was narrowed down to a loose sound card. A little jiggling, fixed. A day and a half.

A lot of planning for the music record, exactly how best to approach it, guessing how long what might take, refining the budget for it. Spoke to Archie Roach's partner Ruby Hunter (Archie has laryngitis and was not allowed to speak), who said Archie singing the songs sounded "...deadly!". Sounds good to me.

Endless phone chasing for someone to translate some of the words of two of our songs into the Bandjalang language, Archie's preferred Indigenous Language for singing. The phone trail went from one contact to another to another (all north coast of New South Wales). Finally getting somewhere with that, but I'm not sure I'm not going to have to take a trip up there next week to ensure we have it done well and on time.

Our opening slot at the Adelaide Festival of Arts has been changed to about the best we could have hoped for...the first Saturday night of the Festival, March the 2nd 2002. That's almost six and a half months away, but already much is being done. A Public Address system has been hired (they run out unless you get in early) and on Friday we're doing a venue test, projecting an anamorphic film at Her Majesty's to see what technical problems we're up against.

And tomorrow we start post-synching with David Gulpilil.

**Monday, August 27, 2001**

Another week gone, highlighted by three days of post-synching with David.

David had a fair bit more post-synching to do than the others. His character has three speech modes: one of them is a sort of "normal" (= expected) heavily accented semi-pidgin, one of them is a much better enunciated "proper" English and the third is Aboriginal Language. Plus he occasionally breaks into Latin, so his task was always going to be the most difficult.

The attempt was to differentiate the two modes of English-speaking as much as possible, to make the contrast between them as great as we could manage whilst still understanding the pidgin clearly. This would serve the drama best...the audience forms the usual picture of the character which is then totally subverted when he speaks perfect English or Latin.

Being a largely instinctive actor, the rigidity of post-synch does not sit easily with David. They were, however, three very constructive and rewarding days. David has always been enthusiastic about the film, but when he saw how it was developing, the enthusiasm boiled over into pure passion, and there was nothing he wouldn't do, no amount of attempts at a line or phrase that he wouldn't undertake.

We'd allowed a substantial amount of time to experiment, as much with methodology as with content. We tried breaking a sentence down into individual words and then editing the words together (this for the "proper" enunciation, with which David had the greatest difficulty...on a day-to-day basis in his normal life, David speaks almost no English, and when he does it is hardly the Queen's version).

Occasionally this would work, but more often the sentence had to be broken down into phrases, which David would either find a way to get himself or attempt to repeat faithfully after me.

Sometimes it would work to do it completely conventionally (hear the guide track, have the cue come through the headphones and try and match it), but more often than not the original guide track was simply a distraction to David.

We ploughed through the material in whatever way seemed the most appropriate for the particular piece (oddly enough David nailed the Latin the most easily), through numbers of technical breakdowns, and finished in substantially less time than we'd allowed.

The translations for the two songs now seem under control. I eventually found someone in Kyogle (northern NSW), Terry Walker, who is going to do it with his father Mick Walker, who seems to speak the Bandjalang language well. This was confirmed by a call I received afterwards from the Federation of A&TSI Languages in Queensland, who confirmed that Mick Walker is indeed an acknowledged Bandjalang expert.

In the meantime Tania and Sar-J toil on with the sound...

### **Sunday, 9 September, 2001**

Although the sound editing continues apace, the last two weeks have, for me, mostly been about things other than "The Tracker". We have to think about what comes next...if we don't begin to set up the next project, things will grind to a financial halt here some time before the film's premiere in March.

It is, therefore, an odd time, the first serious amount of time away from this film for almost a year. Even then the resonances of what we're doing with this keep it close to the surface - I found myself unexpectedly in Arkaroola (researching and writing one possible next project) and of course there were signs of "The Tracker" everywhere, from the locations to the accommodation to the people who work there. It was an odd perspective to have on the place, and it felt almost disloyal to the film that's getting closer to being let out into the world on its own.

Even through this time, there were lots of bits and pieces. Primary among these were Archie's contract negotiations.

These are complicated somewhat because the film and music industries, although related, go about their business in quite different ways, and there's not just a film involved, but also an album. We're used to working with film but not the record industry, they are used to record deals but not the film industry. Sometimes it's hard to make sense of each other's methods.

On the way to Arkaroola (Chris was driving) I attacked the words to the last song, the music for which had arrived the previous week. That song had been delayed pending a knowledge of the length of the end credits. Didn't quite finish the words on the long drive up (once we hit dirt it was impossible to continue), and I finally finished them yesterday (although there's one word I'm still not quite happy with).

A week and a half before the music record and we realised there had been a breakdown in communications about the dates. Archie was performing at the Yeperenye Festival at Alice Springs the weekend before the scheduled start of our recording, and there was no way he could start on Monday morning. A lot of rescheduling and jiggling later and we still start the recording session on the Monday, the incidental music without Archie, and Archie will start Tuesday afternoon.

And finally a couple of days ago all the basic terms and conditions for Archie's contract were agreed upon and we could rest a little easier about that.

Meanwhile Graham came down from Sydney to rehearse with the musicians, for three days prior to the recording. Even that was not so simple...the guitarist/dobro player was still overseas, so rehearsals were limited to drums, bass and keyboard.

When I returned from Arkaroola on Friday evening Graham had a grin from ear to ear. The rehearsals had been terrific for him, some slight changes, some good contributions from the musicians, it was sounding fantastic. I regretted missing the rehearsals, but earning a living (or preparing to) comes ahead of pleasure...mostly I manage to combine the two.

Other issues floated and were dealt with: the draft press kit checked and corrected; copy written for the Festival guide, out next month; questions about the end credits, questions about the grading of an optical; can we afford to re-do the hanging optical and improve its steadiness?; decisions to be made about the sequence of events leading up to the first Festival screening...what technical checks, involving who, how many days before the screening, what rehearsals of band and film, how do we do this? How do we make these decisions when we have no precedent to call on?



Still, we make them, informed guesswork. I'm sure it will be chaos in the lead-up, and somehow a performance will happen. But that's a long way off...we now have two weeks of music recording and mixing, followed immediately by the film's sound mix...then we'll begin to know what we really might have.

## **Tuesday, September 11, 2001**

I'm in seventh heaven...a pig in shit...a sheep in clover. It's Tuesday night, the second day of our music record, one of those times when you wonder about it all: it's my job to be this happy?

Yesterday was good enough. Just three members of the band, Craig on drums, Andy on bass and Mort on keyboards; by the time I got there, song 6 rhythm section had been put down and we started on song 3. A bit of fiddling about, a click track put down, and away the three of them went.

Within seconds I was smiling, within half a minute I had a grin plastered across my face as I realised that the live music performance of the film would work...would not only work, but would be special, would add something to the experience of watching the film, would indeed be a unique cinematic experience.

Things got better. A bit more fiddling about with an organ sound, a comment about an old Hammond sitting in a corner...we wired it up, tried it out, sounded better than the electronic version. No half measures by then, because there was a newly renovated old Leslie (a speaker cabinet with spinning speakers) sitting at the side of the studio. Wired that up to the Hammond and it was like Christmas for me, the sound that I'd been hoping we could get.

All of that was actually rather a lot of fiddling, and in the end we didn't quite get all the pieces of song 3 done (we did it in parts because of the timing changes...what we do during the live performance is another matter).

Then today we also had two sessions, but with Archie there as well. Again quite a bit of setting up to get started because the Leslie had to be moved to a spot outside the actual studio to make way for Archie, a lot of rewiring and resetting of microphones.

Into the business end of the day...song 4, the long "ballad", now with Archie and a Leslie. A few run throughs for the feel, then into one.

What can one say? I've still got a grin on my face, and this is many hours later. The voice, the music, the voice, the band, the voice...

The rest of the session and the following session were spent largely putting the beds down and familiarising Archie with the material in real form rather than guide form. It was a lovely time. Every time Archie hit a line we knew there was something special going on, something that we'd concentrate on getting properly over the following days.

The Hammond became another of the signature sounds of the song sequence (the others being the quality of Archie's voice and the dobro). Every song we tried it in was improved by it. All in all a very exciting couple of days.

### **Saturday, September 15, 2001**

Hard to know how to write about this, the previous days having reduced themselves to an overall "feel"...heavy hearts turning up to do what has to be done (record music), the outside world locked out of the studio, the music taking over.

And what music it is, and what performers...and how little perspective I have on this now, and how all we can do is to try and remember at least what it should be like and if it's better than that, it must be okay. And mostly it does feel better than that.

On the first of these days Steve, the guitarist, arrived (he had been overseas) and began to make his contribution, with guitar and dobro. Another layer was added, another part of the feel of it.

Each song seemed to require a different approach. The free time stuff is the biggest problem, overcome by having Archie sing in his own time, and having Mort follow or lead as appropriate on keyboards, then editing the individual lines onto the previously recorded instrumental base.

Length is an issue...precise timing is an issue. The precision of timing to image that can be obtained from a

computer is not so easily found in a studio with performers, and sometimes a couple of frames, a twelfth of a second, can make the difference between a good cut in the film and a bad cut. We may have to explore a few image changes when this stuff is mixed, not so easy anymore without the non-linear system, but achievable the old-fashioned way, film and mag and Steenbeck (and then a complicated procedure to match this to the sound edit, which runs off a tape of the previous version, and so on...still a lot to think about here).

But mostly, and overwhelmingly, there is the feeling the songs engender, through Archie's complete understanding of them and identification with them. "We have travelled very different paths," he says to me, "and have arrived at the same place."

Then today was something different again, the translating of one and a half songs into the Bandjalang language. In the end we'd had to fly Mick Walker and his daughter Michelle Torrens down from Kyogle for the task. The degree of difficulty for them, trying to do it in isolation, was too great. We were momentarily affected by the big domestic story...they were booked on Ansett. Somehow (and I don't know through who) we were given warning late the evening before. A little chaos for Julie for a bit, solved by them flying from Ballina rather than Lismore, and they arrived almost as scheduled the next day.

Mick, Michelle, Archie and I sat in a hotel room for the day, trying to make this work. It was not easy... structurally the languages differ enormously (sometimes one word for a whole phrase, sometimes a whole sentence for two words), sometimes words simply don't exist, sometimes there are too many choices of word for the one thing.

But there was great determination to respect the language, even though there'll be only a few who ever see the film or hear the CD who would know the difference. What necessarily evolved were songs that have their own meaning, not exactly as written, but a distant reflection of that, more personal to those who still speak the language. We'll record those on Monday.

**Monday, September 17, 2001**

A difficult day, a deep, dark emotional day, yet one of the best days I've had on this entire project. Today was all Archie singing, the incompleted songs and the material in language, and by the end of it we were all a bit excited really, as well as being emotionally wrung out.

We started with the song #10, the last song in the film, all in English except the last couple of lines. As a wrap up to the film, it seemed to work beautifully, Archie's voice rich and powerful as usual, the arrangement and instrumentation just lovely, the words seeming as if they'd always belonged to this song (despite my insecurities about them), all of it just beautiful.

Then the very ending, our first go at anything in language, Archie's father's language, the first time he'd sung in it. Just a line repeated several times, but in its power already an indication of what was to come.

Onto song #3, over the lead-up to the first massacre. This is a tricky piece, in four parts, some free time, some not, some language, some English. Considering we did the translations only on Saturday, Archie was wonderfully well prepared.

We did the first part, in free time, separately, with Graham accompanying Archie on keyboards, leading and following as necessary, this then to be edited into the correct time (a much better way to allow Archie space for performance rather than him having to concentrate on almost nothing but somehow getting the timing right). The next three sections were done in one run.

Almost first up Archie had it, and we could have gone onto the next number. Without any of the other musicians there however, we seemed to have more time, so we tried something new. We played the scene, off videotape, accompanied by what we'd put down. It was already very effective, but we went into another take immediately after seeing it. It had even greater emotional depth, and Archie was on a roll.

Onto what might have been the most difficult number of all, song #8, the aftermath of the second massacre, all in language. Again Archie nailed it straightaway, and again we then watched the scene and went again. David's performance in this scene is so strong it makes your hair

stand on end: Archie's performance in this song is so strong it brings tears to your eyes.

We had to call a break then...people sat silently, I was overwhelmed, Archie was overwhelmed. To have sung this song to these images in his father's language was an experience that rocked him to the core.

The break lengthened necessarily into lunch. After lunch we had one more song to do, song #9, the hanging song, the song that put the greatest strain on Archie's voice (parts of it are near the very top of his range). Again what also struck was how the words sat, naturally, as if they'd been written for it.

Multiple takes of the entire song were not considered wise, so we broke it up and took little rests in between. That done, that successful, we listened through all ten songs to see if any pickups were needed. Having the time, and being on a roll, we decided we could do better (Archie could do better) on all of one song and part of another.

It was over almost as suddenly as it had started...another abrupt film industry parting until next time. We were all enriched by the experience, and all felt we had a real chance of enriching those who choose to come and see the film. Those able to come to a live screening may be privileged (and I don't mean to be sounding like an advertising copywriter here...as I wrote in a recent entry, I've lost perspective).

### **Wednesday, September 19, 2001**

Another two days have passed, and the first song, the first completed song, has emerged at the end of the process.

Tuesday morning was spent replacing and/or adding some guitar work on some of the songs. Upon reflection the previous evening, we felt the guitar work on some of the songs was just too complex, too much of the virtuoso, for the feel of those pieces. Steve's natural inclination is to play fast and complex (which he does very well) and we'd gone with this as it had seemed right at the time. At the end of the process though, with better perspective, we felt it needed simplifying in places.

Steve we knew to be unavailable and as we had a looming problem further down the track with the live performances

anyway (no human can play guitar and dobro at the same time), we called in another guitarist.

Julian arrived (having heard the music for the first time only the night before) and completed the job according to specification in fairly short order. Like Andy, Craig, Mort and Steve before him, he was gifted and professional, and he'll help make the live performances just that much closer to optimum.

Then the editing process began, vocals first, selecting takes, or verses, or lines or even words when such choices presented themselves. In a number of cases there was little or nothing to do...we'd recorded a good take and left it at that, or we'd made decisions about which take (or part thereof) during the recording session. In a number of other cases, however, we'd tried some different things, and it was now a matter of seeing what worked best when the pressure of recording was not upon us.

Occasionally there was a terrific take with just the one vocal glitch in one word, in which case we'd try and replace it with that word from another take.

All done by the end of the day, so the first part of today was spent doing the same thing to the instruments, plus cleaning up any extraneous noise (of this there was plenty...the Leslie has a very high noise floor, which had to be removed whenever it was not playing).

Just after lunch we could begin to think about mixing. Mick (the chief mixer) and Brett (the Protools whizz) had to spend some time setting up, checking links and leads, connecting machinery and so on. Rory (the assistant film mixer, from the SAFC) also turned up, to make sure that all was going to be delivered according to film mix requirements, such that it was mixed, but that we still had the flexibility to change relative levels if required for the film mix.

The particular "sound" for each instrument had to be found and set, the amount of reverb, and so on. Then finally the mix. Mick's fingers danced over the console, and not too much later Graham and I heard our first song, much as it was meant to be and will be, heard. It was crisp, clear and beautiful. Graham and I had the same odd thought: it sounded..."professional", really. Not that we should have been surprised, but all the same it was a nice thought.

**Saturday, September 22, 2001**

The emphasis has been shifting over the past two days, as the music mix ground inexorably on (at least half its time being spent dumping down onto a format suitable for our film mixing) and the next pressure point became the sound edit.

The nature of the phone calls coming from the sound edit to the music studio made me think there was something more amiss than simply the pressure that normally builds up as the mix approaches. The music mix being in good hands (and there being flexibility later anyway), I went back to the office to try and deal with sound, something I should have done more of during the process.

Tania and I started going through the tracks. Much was as it should have been, but I discovered that I had completely failed to communicate my intentions for what were to me some of the most important sections of the film. It's a bad habit I have, where I think and conceptualise and think and discover and something then becomes formed for me. I think about that, and that's how it's going to be, that's now how it is, that's how it's always been because it seems to me to be the right way.

All well and good, but thinking about it is not enough...I have to tell people what I'm thinking. But because by then it is all so obvious to me, I fail to do so. And then I discover that people can't read my mind.

So there's now more to do on the sound edit than there should have been at this stage, and instead of a weekend off before the mix, it's a weekend very much on. Nothing, I don't think, that's unsalvageable, but it's the sort of pressure we just don't need at this point.

Almost co-incidentally we had to shift the start of the sound mix back a day. The music mix, though going well, was not as advanced as we would have hoped by then, and there's still quite a job to do to lay up all the music to the picture. Facilities were not available to do this over the weekend (there is another film premixing), so it'll have to be done on Monday. We're at that point when there is simply not enough time to do everything that needs to be done (mostly at the same time).

Most of Friday was spent going through tracks with Tania and discussing our approach to what needed to be done. Then back to the music studio for the last of the mix there (there were questions of length to be resolved, and

better to be there at the end than to have failed to do something which becomes a much bigger job later). It was still all sounding marvellous, and I don't think we could really be happier with the music than we are.

The last thing that was dumped down was the twelve minutes of single dobro to be used for licks and stings and anywhere else it might prove useful. As I listened again to the fruits of that little session, I got myself fairly excited all over again. Steve, although not sounding so satisfied himself, had done some quite extraordinary playing...the licks we required, some more stuff that started to play around with a theme, then some more extended pieces that were variations on that theme.

It sat well for me, particularly as music that would enhance travelling...walking horse music, I called it. But it was so much more than that. It evoked emotions in me that were very resonant of the film. At the last minute I asked Brett to make me a CD of this material so that I could deal with it during my spare time at the weekend.

I took it home and listened to it a number of times, then wrote down a description and length of each useable piece (they range from six seconds to about a minute and a half), and any musical relationships any of the pieces might have had to each other.

Then it was into a video of the cut of the film, writing down a list of possible areas where this single dobro might work, and how long each of those pieces might need to be. I'd intended to start working out which piece might fit where, but for some completely unknown reason (it was late at night after a heavy week) the CD player would not function in the room where the video was (it's a mystery). That'll have to wait for another day, but the prospect is most exciting.

### **Monday, September 24, 2001**

A day that promised much but delivered little, except a lot to think about and more to do at the end of it than there was at the beginning of it.

A fair bit of time over the weekend at the sound edit, and that went well. There were some big segments to deal with, but talking them through and trying a few things usually solved the larger problems, and Tania then took this start and built on that, cleverly and



systematically, until by Sunday night what had been potentially problematic sequences were ones that I was looking forward to mixing.

This morning was meant to be laying up music, but didn't turn out that way. Mick from the recording studio was delayed, so the masters didn't turn up until at least an hour and a half after we were meant to start with them. Process was worked out so that we'd first transfer all the tracks into the Fairlight (sound computer), clean up the tracks, then lay them against image.

The bulk of the tracks went down well enough, then a crackle sound made its presence felt. Origins a mystery. Rory tries several things to get rid of it, avoid it, go around it. Is it the drive or is it the something else? (I'm lost in these conversations, though I can sometimes make a contribution as to how to think about tracking down the problem).

Eventually phone calls with Fairlight in Sydney, the problem not solved yet, but a way to work around it if we start again from the beginning.

We start again, by now more than half a day behind. The songs sound good, except for song 9, where the acoustic guitar, which drives the song, has somehow almost disappeared, and instead of being strong and rich and powerful, is thin and weedy and barely there. I remember this one clearly from the day, Julian's re-recording of it, we did an extra two takes with a different guitar because the sound was fuller. Note that one down to sort out.

Then finally songs and incidental music against picture... and this, despite the poor video image and the absence of guide track sound (consequences of low budget film making), is what really gives me cause to think. Far from a triumphant marrying of idea and reality, of song with image with story, in parts it rather disturbs me. The songs are so strong, they tend, in places, to overwhelm the image.

I know that the songs are more dominant in this process than they'll ever be in the mix, but still it feels a little disturbing. I can only see problems at this stage, and know we still have a fair bit of work to do, a fair amount of creative thinking and lateral solutions, to make this sit in the film.

James (Currie) is ahead of me here. He's not thinking about problems, he's thinking about solutions, and a few muttered words already get me resting easier...not that I stop thinking about the problems, but at least now I know someone else is thinking ahead of me.

Song 4 provides a different problem...it relies on timing, and when checking it back at the studio we felt we might have to do some internal shot-length adjustments, but we discover that the adjustments are not only to be relative, but absolute as well...the song is somehow several seconds too short. Easy enough to do conceptually, considering the material and the sequence, but actually a lot of extra work, all over the place (transfers, editing, adjusting the length of all the tracks to match, timecode offsets etc). Still, it must be done.

One of the incidental pieces is also too short, by more than several seconds, and might require a more creative approach to it than simply cutting a little picture out. After we stop for the day I ring Mick at the music recording studio, ask for the guitar tracks of song 9 and all the tracks of incidental 7 to be put onto CD Rom so that we can have a go at fixing this stuff tomorrow. He sets straight to work, I'll pick it up early in the morning and we'll see.

## **THE SOUND MIX**

**Tuesday, September 25, 2001**

An early morning trip down to Mixmasters Studio yielded two CDs, one in Protool format, the other an audio file of the same thing, and I was back at the Corporation by start of mixing.

First thing dealt with was the guitar track on Song 9 (the audio file worked fine for that), then a better look at the components of the problematic piece of incidental music and how we might reconstruct them to make the piece fit the picture. In the end, having to deal with picture cuts for Song 4 anyway, the decision was to cut picture for it. The incidental and Song 4 were transferred to recycled 35mm mag stock (an old "Bad Boy Bubby" printmaster, sudden strange memory jogs), and it was off to the Steenbeck to cut the picture with Tania.

It was an odd thing, cutting on film again. Skills were not so much lost as temporarily a little rusty, but what

was most evident was the quality of the picture...the words to Song 4 actually meant a fair bit more once you could see the image properly, and in fact this caused me to rethink our approach. In the end we cut a little over three seconds from one shot nearer the beginning of the song, and added the same amount to a shot almost immediately after the song had finished, so as not to get into all sorts of time-consuming problems of time code off-sets and track editing.

The incidental piece of music was more of a fiddle. We played around with precise placement (for the ending of it) for quite some time...it was not obvious, even three or four frames out made it seem fairly random (could be here, could be there), but once we found the particular spot, there was no moving it. Having it where it was intended meant that the beginning was now quite a few seconds too short, so we looked at where the picture could be cut...nowhere, really, since the piece had musical/action cues in several places, that all sat very well now that we'd found the correct spot for it. Only the first shot could really be cut, and even with that I didn't feel comfortable (it is the length it is because it's meant to be that long). Finally we decided that the only option was in fact to extend the piece of music by repeating the first few bars and bringing it in very softly.

All that was not a bad result for something that seemed like it was going to be much more of a problem, and by the time I got back to the mixing theatre, we were set up to finally begin mixing.

Reel one, dialogue and synch effects...

It was a sort of wonderfully atypical place to start, not that it was reel one, but that it was straight into a song, and that there were all kinds of interesting decisions to be made almost straightaway, and a few new bits of sound that are atmospherically key but that had never been in before (like the Follower playing the ukulele whilst riding his horse along a distant ridgetop).

From the very beginning it felt like we were mixing, that favourite part of the process for me, where all the elements finally start coming together and forming the whole that until this point has only been in your imagination.

The first four minutes were mixed against video (the optical constituting the opening is not yet ready), then mercifully we were able to switch to film.

Film mixing is slower, at times significantly so, compared to mixing against video, but it gives you time to think and you can see what you're doing. Plus you get a real sense of the cinema of the work, which you don't when the resolution is video resolution. I personally don't know how people can stand doing it other than with film, but it's becoming increasingly difficult to do so.

Even three years ago the standard here at the South Australian Film Corporation was to mix with film, but now the standard is to mix with video. Film mixing has become a hassle, and not just here. A projectionist has to be called in (and paid) to run the film, and the number of projectionists who know what they're doing is down to very few.

Bernie (Mays) is one of the last of them, and we're lucky he's kept his working life outside the Film Corporation as flexible as he has, so he can come in and mix with Jim and me (he used to be fulltime, but nowadays, with most people opting to mix video, there's not enough work for him to be anything but very part-time). My first mix here was in 1987, and Bernie was the projectionist, and I suspect my last mix here will be with an aging Bernie on his last job too.

But we're mixing, and it's exciting.

#### **Thursday, September 27, 2001**

Two days of mixing later and we're almost half-way through the dialogue and synch effects premixes of the film. Plenty of downs as well as the ups, but the ups are far stronger, and outnumber the downs substantially...this is a wonderful time.

Much of this time can be likened to ploughing...it's simply hard work, focussed, concentrated, sometimes mechanical, to create the circumstances where the final mix has some freedom. Dialogue equalised, choices made between alternatives, horses walking, more horses walking, still more horses walking (we were somewhat glad yesterday when the packhorse went over the cliff...this reduced the number of horse walking tracks at any time by one).

But there are moments of joy and creativity, and there something truly satisfying about seeing moments much as they'll be in the finished film, moments that were until now only a hope or an expectation...

## **Tuesday, October 2, 2001**

Not enough time and energy to properly keep track of these diaries, at the very time when things are at their most interesting for me. All we've done is mix since the last entry, yet that that seems so long ago, and so much seems to have happened that I can't begin to remember the highlights or the lowlights or even much of the process itself.

We have a schedule of sorts, leading to a screening and the making, with the Dolby rep, of the MO disc, the final component necessary for the lab to make the sound negative. The Dolby rep has to be booked, and he has to come from interstate, so that's a date that one aims for. By Thursday evening it was clear that we were slightly behind schedule, so we decide to use one of our spare days (the Monday public holiday) to catch up.

Saturday was spent in the sound editing room with Tania doing the gunshots. This is actually a very detailed job, made even more so by how particular I am about their exact placement under the paintings, and also by how we'd recorded on location, not always in a way that was easy to follow if you weren't there, gunshots that were meant to be used in very particular ways.

Half past one on Saturday night we were finally through, with all the appropriate plosives and reverberations (sometimes from different locations) and gun cocking mechanisms laid up.

Monday's mix saw almost the end of the dialogue and synch effects...it was a very good day, and with the extra day worked, we were now ahead rather than behind. Today was spent finishing spool 5, completing spool 1, doing the gun runs and any fixups that had come to light during the process (an extra bit of sound needed here, an idea for something there, Tania and Sar-J working long hours to try and keep up with us).

The gun run was more than a little interesting. We spent some time getting the equalisations right, the sounds of each perfect, then left Rory to it...it is the sort of thing he revels in. Placement in the cinema (left,

centre, right, surrounds, a combination of any or all of these) is something he loves to play with, and play with it he does very well.

We played back one of the gun runs starting a minute or two back, carrying everything with us, music, dialogue, other synch effects. For a moment it was a little scary...good, but maybe too good, too strong, almost more than I could bear emotionally. And if I can't bear it emotionally, what chance an audience? I spent much of the next few hours thinking about how to lighten up this sequence...yet there was something compelling about it in all its power. No decisions need be made yet, that can be done in the final mix, but my current thinking is to go for broke, have a look at it in a run and then modify it if necessary when we do fix-ups afterwards.

The end of the gun run also meant the end of dialogue and synch effects, and a big changeover to atmospheres and foley (post-synch effects). A lot of (necessary in most cases) mucking about before we got started, and then a lot more mucking around while we explored particularly the atmospheres for the opening...the beginnings of a run usually take much more time than the general run, as you establish conventions, ways of working, types of approach and styles (how many birds? how much wind?).

Jim loves his atmospheres (he takes an inordinate amount of care in recording them on location), and is very good at working with them. Gradually the opening came together... and we were pleased.

### **Friday, October 5, 2001**

It's hard to imagine that mixing atmospheres and foley can bring such enjoyment, such satisfaction. But it does, and today was a day of great enjoyment for me, and equal satisfaction.

Mixing atmospheres is, in some way, pushing around the sound of air...still air, moving air, slight sounds that inhabit the air. What surprises (and continues to surprise, each film I do) is how much difference to a scene the right (or wrong) atmosphere can make.

There are endless discussions here about what is still, what is breeze, what is wind, how much of what is right for this scene, if the leaves in the foreground move violently but those in the background are still, and the characters are in the background, do you make the scene

windy, breezy or still? There are no absolute answers to these questions, it's a case of what works for the scene. Sometimes what works for one person, doesn't work for another. One person's breeze is another's wind.

What further complicates the issue is the shooting. When shooting, often one films in one direction first, then one turns 180 degrees and films all the shots in the other direction. It may be breezy/windy (don't ask me which is which) in one direction, but several hours later, when shooting into the other direction, the wind has dropped.

When editing, one can't always do very much about this, and sometimes every second shot will have leaves waving about everywhere, every other shot will be still. Many films have the odd scene where this is the case..."The Tracker" probably has more than most because every scene is exterior bush, most during the day.

I don't know how other people solve this problem (sometimes they don't...a number of people have commented to me how in a recent Australian film the wind in the image was blowing gales whereas the sound, including the dialogue, was free of any wind whatsoever, not even the slightest of breezes), but we eventually found our way through it (or think we have found our way through it) by having "gusts of breeze".

We have a basic still atmosphere track (a few birds, a few insects, the 'sound' of Arkaroola), usually different for each scene (there were some seventy or eighty recorded, most in more than one way), and a steady wind (or breeze, depending on your perception) track. Jim then manipulates the wind/breeze track into little gusts, a sort of coming and going of the moving air. Under almost all circumstances, the perception that the wind comes and goes is enough to convince, whether the leaves be still or whether they be moving.

A fair bit of time too is spent sorting out crickets. I have very fixed ideas about crickets, other people are not so rigid. The odd debate about crickets enlivens the day, and usually we end up settling on something that satisfies all.

There was a wonderful period today during which we mixed a scene that had almost no original sound in it at all. It was a night scene, the fourth campsite where the Fanatic hastens the Veteran on his way to that land from whence no traveller ever returns: no dialogue, sound

composed of atmospheres recorded on location (including crickets), breathing recorded in ADR and sound effects done in foley.

Normally I prefer location sound, but this went much the better for the construct. Each sound, being clean of other sounds, could be worked on in detail, particularly the Fanatic's footsteps. Foley had done an exceptionally good job providing the raw material (no editing required at all), but they sounded wrong, perhaps a little clumsy. In the end they began to work when any frequency remotely mid-range was removed...they sounded cautious, with inevitable slight gravel crunch. And Rory has taken to this foley mixing stuff...his sensibility for it is as good as Jim's is for atmospheres, and he comes into his own when presented with an entire scene and all its complexities.

The scene is carried emotionally by Gary's post-synch breathing, which, despite the fact that we rarely see his face in it, so well expresses what is happening, one might almost imagine a whole film being made like this.

This was our third full day of just atmospheres and foley...although we look very much forward to doing the final mix, just to finally get it all correct, we're far from having had enough of this part of the process. It seems almost a pity to be already half way through spool four, when there are only five spools all told.

### **Wednesday, October 10, 2001**

The first day of the final mix yesterday, and during the day I'm frequently reminded why the mixing theatre at the South Australian Film Corporation is my favourite place in the universe.

With the doors closed, the outside world is completely shut away from us. We're here with the film, and neither wars nor weather impinge. It's the most desirable of closed systems if the material you're working with has any attractions, and in this case it does.

I think about the difference between my perception of a film I'm working on and the audience's perception. I know I can never see it like an audience sees it, fresh, new, something different, a film to be viewed like any other film, and held up against those other films for comparison.



But I understand I'm privileged to see it in a way probably no one else will ever see it. Three times today the blood pounded in my head, the tears flowed down my cheeks, the level of my appreciation of what was passing in front of me exceeded anything I might be losing in never being able to see it objectively.

I guess what I see is a sort of culmination, instead of something new. I know the elements very well, their subtleties, the little beautiful bits that can't really be learnt in a single screening, or even several. Now I see all the elements together for the first time, and when they're layered with what I'd hoped for the particular sequence in the first place, it's almost too much to take in.

To experience all the elements and hopes coalescing for the first time is, for me, the very best of all aspects of film making (it's why I say to myself, during the most difficult parts of any shoot, "It's all right, stick with it, you get to mix this").

By mid-afternoon spool one is mixed, and we play it back. Much less powerful for me now, almost no effect, but I know (hope?) that's largely because I'm emotionally exhausted by the previous few hours. And the dialogue seems slightly out of synch, but mentally I ascribe that to the screening back, it all seemed fine as we were doing it.

We start with spool two as we did with one, screening it in full with all the premixes playing at an average level, to get a feel for the whole spool. Again it's out of synch, and we now know there's a problem. The rest of the day is spent beginning to sort out what the problem might be.

This morning was a continuation of that search...an hour into it one of the DADs (a sort of digital audio delivery system) completely packed up, and we knew the reason for at least part of the problem. But we'd been screening a specially prepared piece of film with regular flash frames, matched with audio pips on the appropriate audio projects (to check if synch was drifting), and had discovered that there may be more to the problem than a sick DAD.

Luckily John Simpson (one of the foley artists) had a Fairlight we could borrow for the rest of the week while a replacement DAD was brought in, and by mid afternoon, after it had seemed that no mixing would be done today,

we were back to it. First up was a synch check and fixups for spool one, then synch on spool two, and finally beginning to mix spool 2.

As much as yesterday had been a wonderful day, today was a frustrating one.

#### **Thursday, October 11, 2001**

Mixing...hours of pure, pure joy.

#### **Tuesday, October 16, 2001**

Long, tiring but rewarding hours...little time or energy to write about them. The mix is done, we've had two screenings, done fixups. Almost there.

The last few days of mixing were mostly delightful...the odd technical problem, but in systems as technologically complex as these, the fact that more often than not everything runs smoothly is the surprise. And, in balance, this has been one of the smoothest mixes I've been involved with.

There seems to me to be a great precision about the sound on this one, from the location recording onwards through the track laying to the music recording, through the Foley and the ADR to the mixing. Rarely, for example, has ADR fitted so well with location dialogue. Almost everything is behaving more easily than might be expected.

That's not to say there aren't creative issues. The second massacre is a fine example (or a poor example, in some ways). A lot of work had gone into laying the many tracks, so much so that it was hard to penetrate the sound editor's intent while mixing (and we premixed much of this while Tania was in Melbourne). In the end, we attempted to leave most of the decisions for this sequence until the final mix.

By the time we reached the final mix on this I'd become undecided, particularly because of the power of the first massacre. We played round with the material for this, it didn't satisfy and finally I decided we should go simple, almost the opposite direction to that which we'd been headed in. Only gunshots and close perspective rifle sounds. It seemed like an elegant enough solution to something which had promised to be quite complex.

We sat with that for a bit, but even as we did I sensed there was something wrong with it. During the screenings I figured what it might be...there was no real human connection with the material, therefore the scenes that followed lost their power, were too cold and clinical. So suddenly there was a whole new spot to create sound for, with only a day of fixups available to us. Tania and I listened to every bit of sound recorded for it, and quite a bit of sound recorded for other sequences. We began to find ideas, adding a little bit here, a little bit there, until suddenly it seemed to find its own way, to the point where a new way of looking at it, of mixing it, of reading the scene, evolved. To what degree it works remains to be seen, probably the next time we screen the film, in Sydney next Friday.

Saturday late evening we finished the mixing proper (none of us wanted, by this stage, to work on the Sunday), leaving us sufficient time to transfer to mag and check for the first screening on Monday afternoon. As usual, there was mounting tension before the screening, this time waiting for the opening four minutes of the film to arrive from Sydney (we'd had to mix this bit to video), which it finally did no more than twenty-five minutes before the screening started.

This first screening was not the best...the rushed add-on of the opening had somehow caused the first spool to run a couple of frames out of synch (something that couldn't be picked until about five minutes in, by which time it felt too late to stop and start again); the next three spools were each, through a quirk of just-in-case efficiency, three quarters of a frame out of synch while the change to the last spool went wrong and the film had to stop for some seconds before re-starting, now also slightly out of synch.

Three quarters of a frame out is not much, just enough to give one doubts, especially after weeks of mixing, when synch is an ever-present issue. So the screening was only really a problem for those of us deeply involved in the last few weeks. Others in the audience seemed not to mind, or notice, and the film was enthusiastically received by the dozen or so other people present.

For the next screening, in the evening, we were much better prepared. The just-in-case three quarters of a frame problem had been rectified and the film ran splendidly all the way through. I liked it a lot, even though I came out with a fairly lengthy list of little

fixups I wanted to do. Others too were enthusiastic about the film, but these screenings dominated by stakeholders and contributors are to be treated with the utmost suspicion as far as objective judgement of the film is concerned, particularly when there are no dissenting voices (at least after the first screening my daughter told me she preferred "Pearl Harbor", a reality check if there ever is one).

And so today a day of fixups. First a meeting to go through our comments and which ones were going to be attacked, a listing of which premises had to be gone into, which fixups could be done simply by adjusting the final. Then we started steadily working our way through the material.

Fifty-two changes later and it was done, ready for the making of the MO discs tomorrow and Thursday, and the screening in Sydney on Friday.

This was a sort of completion. Most of what remains is, for us, technical, and there's not even very much of that. Looking at the film now, I start to get detached from it, probably because there's no opportunity to do much more with it. Is it good? Depends on your point of view, I suppose. It seems to work, the drama, the performances, the paintings, the music, the sound. And I like it, rather a lot...there's clearly something here, but what is actually here is entirely in the hands (mind) of each individual viewer.