AWE AND WONDER IN WALES



Despite the film tackling some heavy topics, there's a thread of classic British humour running throughout (Credit: *Out There* film)

Jumping from high-end television to an independent feature film, Catherine Goldschmidt ASC BSC effortlessly combines entertainment and emotion through her visuals on Welsh sci-fi *Out There*.

When experienced filmmakers offer advice to upcoming talent, one message regularly crops up: build a solid network as soon as possible. The connections you make early on in your career are often some of the most important. So it proved for Simon Ryninks, who, thanks to the network he built years ago, was able to recruit an Emmy nominee to lens his directorial debut, the 1990s-set *Out There*, which follows a teen astronomer on the hunt for truth in a Welsh coastal town. That Emmy nominee? Catherine Goldschmidt ASC BSC, a DP whose recent credits include hit shows like *House of the Dragon* and *The Last of Us*.

"Simon, the director, is a very old friend of mine," Goldschmidt reveals, explaining how she came to join the project. "We did some shorts and music videos together back in the day, so I always knew about this film. He'd been developing it for something like seven years with the BFI, so it was a long journey."

Despite regularly travelling across the globe shooting prestige television, Goldschmidt kept a close eye on how her friend's project was developing.

"We talked about it over the years," she says, "and I read some early drafts. From the start, I loved the script, and I knew it came from a real place. It was Simon's way, I think, of processing the loss of his own mother, who was Welsh. So I knew it had a genuine emotional centre. In the end, it was really just a timing thing, whether everything was going to line up. Magically, it did. I literally wrapped *The Last of Us*, had a week at home, and then went to Wales. So it worked out perfectly."

Due to that pre-existing relationship, "there was a lot of trust there", with the pair working closely to build a visual language for the film – taking inspiration from a rather well-known filmmaker. "In terms of references, Steven Spielberg was definitely a big one," she says. "Not just the *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* side of things, but also films like *The Goonies* and *Hook*; those family-orientated adventure films full of quirky characters and a sense of wonder."

One slight difference to those films, though, was the budget. "At the same time, we knew Spielberg operates at a completely different scale. We were making a small independent film in Wales, so we also looked at films like *Submarine*; something more grounded and indie, but still imaginative. The result is a combination of something that aspires to be larger and more adventurous, while also feeling very homegrown."

Sure enough, despite the budgetary limitations, that sense of awe and wonder is ever-present throughout the movie. Following Nerys Amber Stocks' Maz as she aims to prove not only that aliens are real, but that her father Lew (Iwan Rheon) was abducted by them, this feels like the kind of heartwarming family entertainment that has arguably been squeezed out of the mainstream.

For Goldschmidt, lighting was the secret to bringing that magic to the screen. "One of the ideas Simon and I developed centred around the orange light associated with Maz's father and the UFO," says the DP. "As cinematographers, we're always asking where the light in a scene comes from. In prep, we read about how some people bring small red lights with them to stargaze because red light doesn't interfere with your vision at night. I took that idea and adapted it slightly. Red often carries harsher or more aggressive associations in cinema, so we shifted it towards orange – the combination we used was Chrome Orange and Full CTO.

"From there, we connected everything through that visual motif. We introduced it during the first stargazing scene with her father, carried it through subsequent stargazing scenes, and ultimately linked it directly to the UFO. For me, that orange light became a symbol of her father, of otherworldly magic, and of that sense of awe that runs throughout the film."



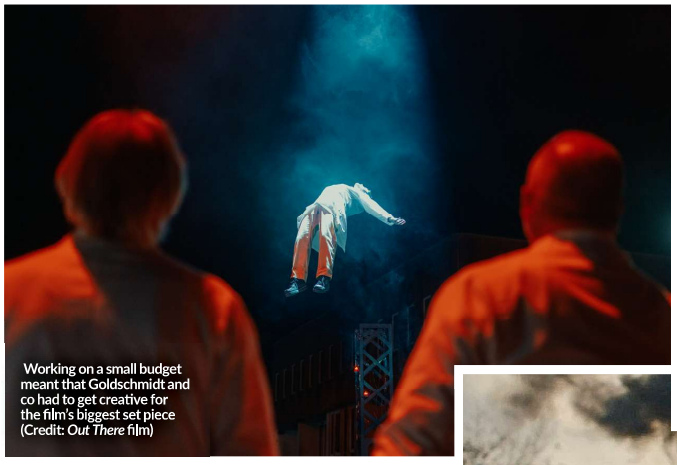
In the words of Goldschmidt, "location was everything" (Credit: Hanna-Katrina Jędrosz)



Out There follows Maz as she aims to prove not only that aliens are real, but that her father Lew was abducted by them (Credit: Out There film)

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

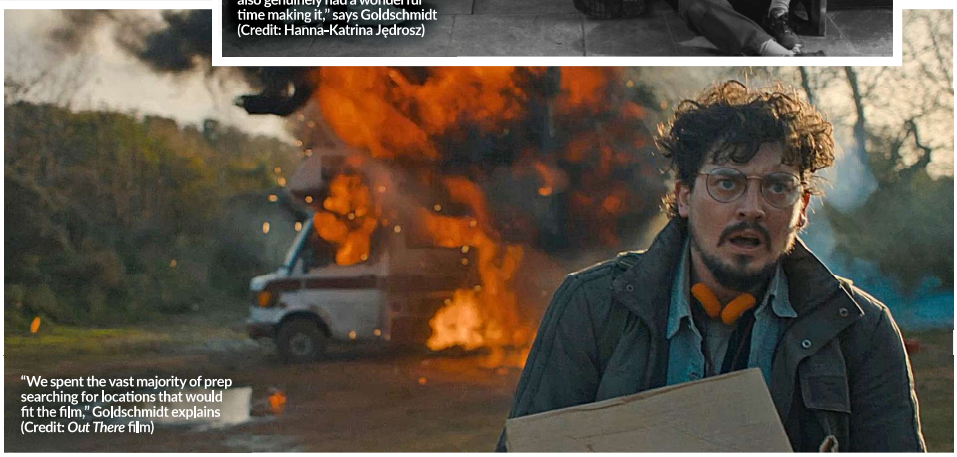
The first glimpse of a UFO comes through a canopy of trees in a forest, leaving the audience guessing over whether what the characters think they've seen is real – and if so, just what those potential extraterrestrials are up to. "For the forest scenes, we worked with Christian Reynish at Aerial Craft – they were fantastic and supplied an Alta X with Ronin 2 gimbal. I'd never put lights on a drone before, so I wanted to understand what was possible. They had experience mounting custom lighting systems onto drones and helped run a series of tests using a



Working on a small budget meant that Goldschmidt and co had to get creative for the film's biggest set piece (Credit: *Out There* film)



"On a film like this, everyone works incredibly hard, but we also genuinely had a wonderful time making it," says Goldschmidt (Credit: Hanna-Katrina Jędrosz)



"We spent the vast majority of prep searching for locations that would fit the film," Goldschmidt explains (Credit: *Out There* film)

Nanlux spot from Greenkit and a custom adapted hunting torch which was gimballed. In the end, we opted for a customised 10-array Stratus flood, which we gelled to our orange colour."

Following this close encounter, viewers eventually get a proper look at the otherworldly threat, as Lew is seemingly abducted by a UFO, with bright lights beaming down and Rheon's character levitating skywards during the film's most stunning set piece.

Again, working on a small budget meant that Goldschmidt and co had to get creative. "When you're making a £2.5 million film and you come across a scene like that, everybody has to stop and ask: what do we actually need in order to sell this?" Goldschmidt smiles. "The key thing was that Maz *had* to witness her father's abduction, and the audience *had* to see that moment. We couldn't simply imply that it happens, because the entire film revolves around viewers getting behind Maz's truth. The audience had to experience it with her. So, we opted for a wire rig and practical effects so the actor could physically leave the ground."

This set piece takes place at the test site where Maz's father works, which needed to feel "slightly militaristic and scientific at the same time". The team eventually found an abandoned water facility, which turned out to be "perfect" as they had "complete freedom" to work with. From a lighting standpoint, Goldschmidt went bigger and bolder. Unlike the shots in the woods, which are more obscured, the scale of this sequence required larger fixtures mounted on machinery. "Ayrton Dominos moving lights were key," Goldschmidt explains. "As I've mentioned, I became slightly obsessed with finding exactly the right orange colour, so we gelled one to match the drone and had another to do the abduction light, which we rigged on the stunt Manitou that was lifting him up."

A TRUE WALES TALE

The test site is just one interesting location among many in the film, with the setting of Wales, which provided surprisingly fair weather – "it barely rained on us in October, and that is crazy!" – fundamentally influencing the visuals. In the words of Goldschmidt, "location was everything", with Welsh identity running through every scene.

"We spent the vast majority of prep searching for locations that would fit the film," she explains. "Simon originally wrote the story around a very specific place in Wales from his childhood, somewhere he visited with his mother during summers and Christmases. For practical reasons, though, it was decided we should shoot around Cardiff, where we could work with local crew members and keep production manageable.

"The seaside town we ended up using was Porthcawl, which we found fairly early on. It had exactly the right feel, with the arcade, the seafront and the fairground. I believe that whole area has changed significantly since then, so I'm really glad we captured it when we did because that texture adds so much to the film."

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the toughest locations to find was Maz's house, which needed to feel "authentically 1990s, which is hard to find because most people have modernised their homes over the years". Several scenes are set there, so the location had to work for multiple purposes. "We looked at countless houses before finally finding the right one. I think it happened to be for sale at the time. Walking into it was a genuinely happy moment because after so many unsuccessful options, this one finally worked."

The location of Wales not only influenced the visuals, though, but the storytelling. Despite the film tackling some heavy topics, there's a thread of classic British humour running throughout, with emotional beats interspersed with genuine laugh-out-loud comedy. "How to effectively shoot comedy was a question we were asking ourselves from the very beginning," Goldschmidt explains. "Initially, inspired by Spielberg, we wanted to create these elaborate, choreographed oners. But comedy is so dependent on timing that we realised we needed the flexibility to cut to reactions or punchlines when necessary. A lot of those more ambitious ideas simply didn't work as well. Breaking scenes into individual shots often helps because it takes some pressure off."

Enhancing the comedy regularly meant getting creative with kit and setup. "We were constantly asking ourselves what the most enjoyable and effective way to shoot each scene would be," she continues. "One fun example was a 10mm lens that Simon became obsessed with because he thought it looked incredibly 1990s. We used it for the montage sequence where the kids are asking townspeople whether they've seen anything that looks like an alien. That felt like our little 1990s music video moment in the middle of the film, and the lens was perfect there."

While using specialist lenses on occasion, however, Goldschmidt relied on a slightly more traditional camera and lens package overall, opting for an ARRI Alexa 35, "which I'd been using extensively over the previous few years on television projects and which I trusted to come through, particularly in low-light situations", and regularly pairing them with Canon K35s, "which I've used many times before". "Sunbelt supplied the package and supplemented it with Canon FDs," Goldschmidt explains. "It was a lovely collection of vintage lenses, including a K35 zoom, and we ended up using almost the entire set throughout the film."

A DREAM TEAM

In-camera footage was enhanced by a stunning colour grade, which was "hugely important" to get right. Since the team was drawing inspiration from so many 1990s films, they wanted a "genuinely filmic quality" in the colour, contrast and overall image, Goldschmidt explains. "I developed a LUT in advance with Gareth Spensley at Company 3 and colourist Christine Kelly at Gorilla," she continues. "Gareth and Christine collaborated on the look development together, which I really appreciated, and we worked closely throughout. I'm really happy with how it all turned out."

This collaborative philosophy was present throughout the shoot, with Goldschmidt's team working together to squeeze every last drop out of their budget. "I'd really love to shout out the whole team because this film was truly a labour of love," she explains. "Our gaffer, Jack Midgley, and his team did amazing work. My focus puller, Cristina Cretu, was fantastic. Our DIT, Calum 'Bob' Weir, was brilliant. And key grip Elliot Sebastian-Reagan was equally outstanding. On a film like this, everyone works incredibly hard, but we also genuinely had a wonderful time making it. It was one of those dream scenarios where the set felt warm, caring and collaborative, while also being full of complete professionals." ■



Goldschmidt (right) on set with "old friend" and director Simon Ryninks (Credit: Hanna-Katrina Jędrosz)