

Pierre Gill, CSC creates a fantastical world for **Outlander**

Film stocks

KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229, KODAK VISION2 250D 5205, KODAK VISION2 50D 5201

Digital Intermediate

Deluxe Toronto

Pierre Gill's mantel is getting crowded. Since 1995, his art has earned him over 21 nominations for cinematography awards in the U.S., Canada, Europe and South America. He has earned top honors 13 times, including four Canadian Society of Cinematographers Awards, two Genie Awards, and an American Society of Cinematographers Award. In 2007, Gill was honored with the prestigious Kodak New Century Award for outstanding contribution to the art of cinematography in Canada. His credits include *The Rocket*, *The Legend of Rocket Richard*, *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* and *Le Piège Américain*.

His most recent project is *Outlander*, written by Dirk Blackman and Howard McCain. The film is a fantastical feature that includes interplanetary travel, Iron-Age Viking battles, and a malevolent alien creature called a Moorwen. "The script had elements of sci-fi and horror within a period epic, so I knew it would be a big challenge, especially given the schedule," Gill divulges.

Gill and McCain, who also directed the film, opted to frame the story in a 2.35:1 aspect ratio

for an epic feel. During early discussions they focused on the appropriate level of contrast and color saturation. "I envisioned a nice, rough look with a lot of ambience, smoke and dust to evoke the Viking era," says Gill. "We did anything we could to get the image dirty for that world."

Dynamic and dimension

Some sequences take place on the main character's home planet, which is more advanced than Earth. There, Gill placed the story in a clean, modern, sci-fi look.

Throughout the film, Gill's photography was to be melded with extensive CGI work. Often he was lighting actors against greenscreen backdrops to create elements for compositing with CG environments. "I tried to be involved as closely as possible with the CG artists," he explains. "Those scenes were all about the dynamic and the dimension in the frame, and the depth you create with layers and interactive lighting. You can't miss. If it didn't look right, the audience would sense it immediately."

Gill chose to shoot *Outlander* on three film stocks: KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 5229 for night exteriors, KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 film for day exteriors, and for a few bright exterior situations, KODAK VISION2 50D 5201 film. He used mostly Panavision camera equipment. For more elaborate scenes, two cameras were on Steadicam rigs. Gill had a Technocrane at his disposal for the entire shoot.

"The producers objected at first, but by the end they agreed it was money well spent, because the Technocrane saved us so much time and added so much production value on the screen," says Gill.

He notes that shooting film was also a logistical decision. "For me, film is a big practical advantage because of its simplicity," says Gill. "You can have multiple cameras without matching problems, you can shoot in any conditions, and you can shoot at any speed and use shutter techniques. Often, we used four or five cameras on *Outlander*, especially in the huge battle scenes. We were shooting in Halifax in late autumn, so the

weather was frequently cold and wet. But we had no technical problems, and everything matched perfectly."

Beautiful medium

"We had a 50-day schedule, which is very tight for a film like this," he adds. "You can't wait for technical problems when you have these big expensive scenes with hundreds of extras. Also, for me, film is the best, most beautiful medium. The latitude allows you to work fast, and work by eye."

The DI was done at Deluxe in Toronto with Chris Wallace. "The 5229 captures a lot of details, which helps when you get to the digital intermediate," Gill observes. "I can manipulate the contrast a little bit and get a nice, rich image."

Gill says that film also allows him to concentrate on the creative aspects of his job. "I like to work with the *mise en scène*," he says. "I like to stay close to the director and talk about the scene and the shots. I don't need to spend time doing the more technical things that the digital format demands."



1 Pierre Gill, CSC on the set of *Outlander*. Photo by Shayne Laverdière 2 The camera barge sets up a shot of the Viking Ship in *Outlander* on location in Newfoundland. Photo by Mike Tompkins