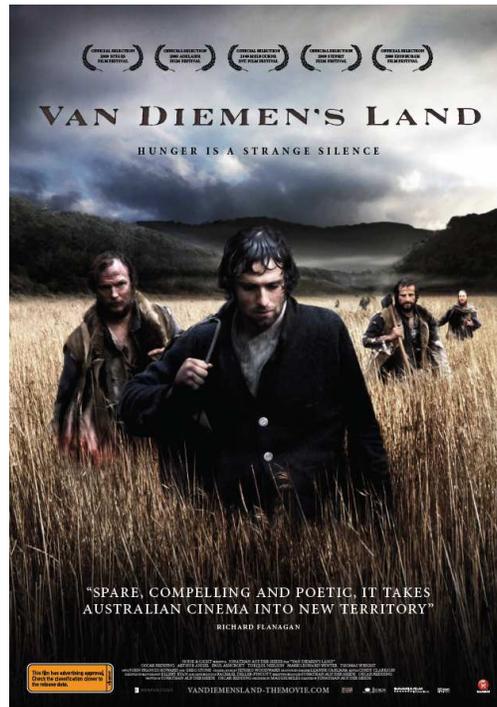




# MADMAN

PRESENTS



## VAN DIEMEN'S LAND

A Noise and Light Film

A film by Jonathan auf der Heide

PUBLICITY:

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# MADMAN

## THE STORY

1822: Eight desperate convicts' infamous escape into the beautiful and brutal Tasmanian wilderness. God wields an axe and there can be only one survivor: Alexander Pearce.



## RUN TIME

104 mins

## RATING

TBC

## RELEASE DATE

Australian Release 27 August 2009

World Premiere Adelaide Film Festival 26 February 2009

## WEBSITE

<http://www.vandiemensland-themovie.com>

## TAGLINE

*Hunger is a strange silence*

## GENRE

Drama / Suspense

## CAST

Oscar Redding  
Mark Leonard Winter  
Arthur Angel  
Paul Ashcroft  
Torquil Neilson  
Thomas Wright  
Greg Stone  
John Francis Howard  
Adrian Mulraney



# MADMAN

## CREW

Director	Jonathan auf der Heide
Producer	Maggie Miles
Writers	Jonathan auf der Heide Oscar Redding
Executive Producers	Jonathan auf der Heide Oscar Redding
Associate Producer	Rachael Deller-Pincott
Director of Photography	Ellery Ryan
1 <sup>st</sup> Camera Assist	Paul Hughes
2 <sup>nd</sup> Camera Assist	Cameron Matheson
Digital Information Technician	Cail Young
Camera Attachment	Andrew Kerestes
Production Manager	Maggie Miles
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Director	Ben Plazzer
Production Designer	Leanne Caruana
Costume Designer	Leanne Caruana
Editor	Cindy Clarkson
Composer	Jethro Woodward
Hair and Make-up	Anke Hansen Loren Bell
SFX Make-up	Paul Hasell
Production Coordinators	Kate Vanston/Tamasin Simpkin
Production Secretary/Runner	Alice Glenn
Unit Manager	Clay Baird
Grip/Gaffer	Birrin King
Sound	Joel Valerie
Boom	Hamish Pratt
Storyboard Artist	Florence Ghent



# MADMAN

## ONE LINER

The true story of Australia's most notorious convict, Alexander Pearce and his fateful escape into the beautiful yet brutal Tasmanian wilderness, a land where God wields an axe.  
Of eight men, there can be only one survivor.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

1822. Macquarie Harbour, a remote prison camp guarded by miles of impenetrable wilderness, was feared by convicts banished there as a fate worse than death. Sentenced to slave labour, a work party of eight Irish, English and Scottish thieves attempt the impossible in an infamous bid for freedom. Totally unprepared for the arduous journey ahead, their escape into the harsh Tasmanian wilderness becomes a futile battle between man and nature. As supplies dwindle and tensions amongst the group escalate, they soon contemplate the unthinkable.

“No man knows what he’s capable of until driven by hunger.”

This visually stunning debut by Jonathan auf der Heide is based on the confronting and horrific confessions of Australia's most notorious convict, Alexander Pearce. *VAN DIEMEN'S LAND* parallels Dante's descent into hell with this tainted secret of colonial Australia that rumbles deep in the earth beneath our feet. Earth stained with the blood of our forebears.





# MADMAN

## LONG SYNOPSIS

*Hunger is a strange silence.*

A point of no return for convicts banished from their homeland, Van Diemen's Land was a feared and dreaded penal settlement at the end of the earth. Its entrance was Macquarie Harbour, named 'Hell's Gates' by its prisoners as a reference to the gates of hell in Dante's 'Inferno' - *Abandon all hope ye who enter here* - was plastered at the Harbour's mouth as a warning to all souls sent there.

This film is based on the true story of Alexander Pearce, Australia's most notorious convict, whose confessions were so confronting and horrific they were not at first believed.

In 1822, eight convicts escaped Macquarie Harbour in a fateful bid for freedom. This band of Irish, Scottish and English thieves were immediately hurled into chaos as their plan failed and they were thrust into the heart of a harsh and foreboding landscape. With little food or equipment, they battled a merciless enemy - the unforgiving, barren land, in a place these immigrants knew little about - a land where God wields an axe.

Led by ex-sailor and experienced navigator Robert Greenhill, the men become lost and Greenhill's leadership is challenged by Pearce's closest friend Alexander Dalton. As supplies run out and tensions escalate, the group soon contemplates the unthinkable. The futile battle between man and nature turns man onto himself.

Kill or be killed? After their journey ends we are left with the timeless question: Does this darkness of human nature lurk within us all?

'Van Diemen's Land' evokes the sheer desperation & fear that all convicts endured in this terrifying wild land where still today this tainted secret of early Australian settlement rumbles deep in the earth, earth stained with the blood of its forebears.

Parallels with Dante's epic poem interlace this chilling tale as we follow Alexander Pearce's descent through the circles of hell to the depths of his own dark soul.

VAN DIEMEN'S LAND is a brutal story of absolutely breathtaking beauty.



# MADMAN

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It's impossible to grow up in Tasmania without being aware of the true story of Alexander Pearce and his fateful escape. The myth of the 'Van Diemen's Land Cannibal' is one of Tasmanian folklore and has found its way into countless books or songs.

But little is known by the general public of the fate of Pearce and his fellow escapees beyond the titillating myth of murder and cannibalism. In the past, works such as *For the 'Term of His Natural Life'* (Marcus Clarke) took liberties with the events and portrayed Pearce as a bloodthirsty monster that lured fellow convicts into the bush to dine on their flesh.

It's my belief that such misconceptions and exaggerations haven't done the story justice. They only scrape the surface as to why a man would go to such lengths; and how colonial Australia could produce such a horrific brutal tale. Portraying Pearce as a monster is the easy story to tell and was a marketable product for 19<sup>th</sup> century audiences. But today we demand honesty no matter how confronting.

The true and documented events of what happened in 1822 are horrific enough without embellishment. To characterise Pearce as a human being, not so very different in his essential nature to you or I, as a man who through extraordinary events did what he had to do to survive, is what makes this story interesting and relevant to an audience today.

Perhaps it's not the anticipation of who is to be killed next or the desperate fight for freedom that makes this story intriguing, but more so the questions it asks of its audience. It's the great stories that, once we're witness to them, leave us changed. It's the great stories whose essence and meaning resonate to affect our own lives through understanding. It's the great stories that create a momentum of their own and demand to be watched and heard. The true story of Alexander Pearce is one of those stories.

Eight convicts venture through the heart of the wilderness and into the wildness of their own nature. In their bid for freedom they take us into a brutal world that confronts us with questions of our instinctual nature. Is it human instinct to kill in order to survive? I believe it's the very reason as to why we're here today and consequently, underneath our veil of 'civilization' is a repressed need for violence. *VAN DIEMEN'S LAND* not only explores Australia's dark colonial past but it also questions our very idea of what it is to be human.



# MADMAN

## JONATHAN AUF DER HEIDE – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Jonathan grew up in Tasmania where, in the early days of British settlement the convict Alexander Pearce and his comrades were kept captive on Sarah Island. Jonathan has held a long time ambition to bring this story to the screen and embarked on study at the VCA School of Film and Television (University of Melbourne) to develop the necessary skills, including moonlighting on Paul Cox's latest film *Salvation* as the Assistant Editor.

Jonathan's VCA graduating film *Hell's Gates* was a preview to this feature and has earned success in its own right screening at the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Showcase for Australian contemporary cinema at the Australia America Society in New York and in competition at the 31<sup>st</sup> edition of the Rencontres Henri Langlois International Film Schools Festival.

An experienced actor, Jonathan has performed with many Tasmanian and Victorian companies including the Melbourne Theatre Company and ensemble outfit The Keene Taylor Project that premiered the works of playwright Daniel Keene.

Jonathan regularly teaches for the VCA Foundation Course, passing on his knowledge and passion for filmmaking to young film enthusiasts.

### AWARDS

2007 Village Roadshow Award for BEST FILM (*Hell's Gates*)

2007 Film Victoria Award for BEST 3<sup>rd</sup> YEAR PRODUCTION (*Hell's Gates*)

2007 National Film and Sound Archive Award for BEST DIRECTOR (*Hell's Gates*)

2007 Emerging Film Maker 2008 – Melbourne International Film Festival (*Hell's Gates*)

2008 Best Student Film – Melbourne International Film Festival (*Hell's Gates*)

2008 Brian Robinson Script Award (*Hell's Gates*)



# MADMAN

## MAGGIE MILES-PRODUCER

Maggie's first short doc. *Nitmiluk Mujik* (co-producer) was awarded an Australian Tourism Award and NT Brolga Award. Her first short drama *The Replacement* took 4<sup>th</sup> place in the AFI's Reinventing the Reel competition.

As senior producer and writer for Burrundi Pictures in the Northern Territory, Maggie produced a wide range of TVCs and media campaigns including the successful *Choose Yourself - Audition Event* resulting in a series of cutting edge TVCs. *It's got to stop . . .* a domestic violence media campaign produced by Maggie was awarded an Australian Violence Prevention Award certificate of Merit from the Australian Heads of Government.

Maggie was Casting Director on the feature *Yolngu Boy* for which she also produced an arts program in Arnhem Land facilitating community input into the script development process. Maggie has also worked on the features *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *My Year Without Sex*.

As a young theatre director and actor Maggie was a finalist in the NT Young Achiever of the Year Arts Award and her work as Artistic Director of Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre contributed to the company being awarded a Queens Trust Award for outstanding artistic services for young people. For the stage Maggie has written *Worry Dolls*, *BRANDED* and *Insight* to critical acclaim. She is a creative workshop facilitator for the Arts Centre and ran film workshops at the Loke Kurtina Workshop in East Timor.

Trained at East 15 Acting School in London Maggie is still a working actor recently taking roles in *City Homicide* (Dir. Nicholas Buffalo) the features *Salvation* (Dir. Paul Cox) and *Under a Red Moon* (Dir. Leigh Sheehan) and on stage for the Arts Centre (Victoria), the Melbourne Fringe Festival and the VCA.

### ASSOCIATED AWARDS

2008 Best Student Film – Melbourne International Film Festival (*Hell's Gates*)

2007 Village Roadshow Award for BEST FILM (*Hell's Gates*)

2007 William T Marshall Memorial Prize for most outstanding Producer (*Hell's Gates*)

1996 Queens Trust Award – Outstanding Artistic Services to Young People - CIYT

1994 Finalist – NT Young Achiever of the Year Arts Award

1991 NT Brolga Award - Best Electronic Media Program - *Nitmiluk Mujik*

1991 Australian National Tourist Award - Best Electronic Media Program - *Nitmiluk Mujik*



# MADMAN

## ELLERY RYAN-DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Graduating from Swinburne Film School in 1976, Ellery worked as camera assistant and DOP at Fred Schepisi's Film House before becoming a freelance DOP.

Ellery's career continues to be outstanding, spanning over 30 years as a cinematographer for films such as *The Rage in Placid Lake*, *Grievous Bodily Harm*, *Death in Brunswick*, *Visitors*, *Cosi*, *Angel Baby*, and Telemovies/Series *The Brush Off*, *Young Indiana Jones* and *The Secret Life of Us*.

Ellery has won two AFI awards for Best Cinematography and has worked in New York, where he shot *Wishful Thinking*, a feature for Miramax and was DOP on *The Matchmaker* for Working Title.

In 2007 Ellery shot the award winning short film *Hell's Gates* which was made as a preview to this feature.

### AWARDS

- 2006 ACS Vic Gold Award for Cinematography (Short Drama, *The Tank*, dir. Julius Avery)
- 1999 Golden Tripod, Australian Cinematographers Society (*Dead Letter Office*)
- 1995 AFI Award Best Achievement in Cinematography (*Angel Baby*)
- 1991 AFI Award Best Achievement in Cinematography (*Spotswood*)

### NOMINATIONS

- 1995 AFI Award Best Achievement in Cinematography (*That Eye, the Sky*)
- 1998 AFI Award Best Achievement in Cinematography (*Grievous Bodily Harm*)

## OSCAR REDDING-WRITER / ACTOR

Oscar has performed with some of Australia's most exciting and progressive theatre companies including the Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company and Playbox Theatre. His television and film work includes *Sea Change*, *The Secret Life of Us*, *Blue Heelers*, *Stingers*, *Ponderosa*, *Skeletons*, *Backlands*, and the short film *Hell's Gates*.

As a writer/director, critics have compared Oscar's work to theatre heavy weights, Romeo Casstalucci, Peter Brook and theatre group Forced Entertainment for his productions of *Marie*, *Convict 102*, *Macbeth's Cock*, *51 Ashworth Street*, *The Arcade Project*, *An Evening with the Devil*, and *Hamlet*.

Oscar's directorial debut was the independent feature *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, a modern exploration on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It was shot in 9 days for the budget of AU\$13,000. It premiered at the 2007 Melbourne International Film Festival to critical acclaim and has since become a study tool for drama students. Oscar recently secured development funding from the Australian Film Commission to write his next feature script *BlackBlood*.



# MADMAN

## HISTORY

Van Diemen's Land, now known as Tasmania was given its name by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1642. For 50 years Australia's southern isle was the dumping ground for convicted criminals and the isolated Sarah Island on the West Coast was the most notorious of all Penal Settlement's between 1822 and 1833.

Established as a place for 'secondary' punishment, to hold captive the worst convicts or those that had escaped other settlements, it was the place for total banishment built in attempt to control the uncontrollable. It earned a singular reputation as one of Australian colonies', if not the British Empire's harshest settlements, a place of unspeakable horrors, and a living hell.

Found in the far southwest corner of Macquarie Harbour, within sight of the world renowned Gordon River, the only means of access was through a narrow channel known as 'HELL'S GATES'. This journey through this narrow passage resulted in many deaths due to treacherous seas. The settlement itself was surrounded by mountainous wilderness. It was a place so remote that the convicts became deeply affected by the natural world that enclosed them, driven to near madness by the harsh and inhospitable land.

A surveyor who mapped out the site concluded that the chances of escape were "next to impossible".

\* \* \*

Lieutenant Governor William Sorrell's standing orders to Lieutenant John Cuthbertson, Macquarie Harbour's first commandant.

"You will consider that the constant, active, unremitting employment of every individual in very hard labour is the grand and main design of your settlement. They must dread the very idea of being sent there... You must find work and labour, even if it consists in opening cavities and filling them up again... Prisoners upon trial declared that they would rather suffer death than be sent back to Macquarie Harbour. It is the feeling I am most anxious to be kept alive."

The Settlement proved unable to support itself. Malnutrition, dysentery and scurvy were rampant. Living conditions were so crowded that it was claimed to be impossible for a convict to sleep on their back, and floggings were regular, with 9,100 lashes being given in 1823 alone. Ergot was added to bread so that it would turn mouldy quickly, thus preventing convicts from saving up their rations. In 1824 it was reported that one of the prisoners killed another convict so that he would certainly be executed, rather than face continued detention on Sarah Island.

*Hunger is a strange silence.*



# MADMAN

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## MATERIALS

All materials including key art and production stills can be found on our press site:  
[www.madman.com.au/pressarea](http://www.madman.com.au/pressarea)

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