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# JUDAS COLLAR

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# INFORMATION



**Title:** Judas Collar  
**Year of Production:** 2018  
**Country of Production:** Australia  
**Production Company:** No Thing Productions Pty Ltd  
ABN 30 615 241 006

**Length:** 15 minutes  
**Genre:** Drama  
**Shoot Gauge:** Digital  
**Finish Gauge:** DCP  
**Aspect:** Anamorphic – 2:35:1 (scope)  
**Sound Format:** 5:1  
**Language/ Subtitles:** No dialogue / English credit sequence

**Contacts:**

<i>Producer</i>	<i>Publicity</i>
Brooke Tia Silcox	Olga Zhurzhenko
brooke@no-thing.co	olga@moviesthatmatter.us
+61 439 481 084	+1 818 575 0940

**Trailer link:** <https://vimeo.com/296240730>  
**Movie link:** <https://vimeo.com/257652101>  
**Website URL:** [www.judascollar.com](http://www.judascollar.com)

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"Easily the best short film I've seen this year and the most heartbreaking."

— EMPIRE MAGAZINE

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# SYNOPSIS

In outback Australia a wild camel is captured and fitted with a tracking device known as a Judas Collar.

Based on a real life practice, *Judas Collar* is a scripted, non-dialogue, live action short that explores the story of a camel used to betray her kind.

## How far would you go to protect the herd?





# AWARDS & FESTIVALS

*Judas Collar* won Best Narrative Short at Austin Film Festival and Best Film at St Kilda Film Festival, twice qualifying it for Best Live Action Short at the 2020 Academy Awards.

“*Judas Collar* is one of the best and important short films to come out of Australia... a wealth of empathy within every frame.”

— THE CURB



Academy Accredited®											



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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“*The Judas Collar preys upon the most human qualities of the camel – its need for connection, family and belonging.*” — ALISON JAMES

Some stories can change the course of your entire life and this is one of them. I had been directing on the Australian show *Outback Truckers*, filming alongside Australia's toughest truck drivers and I was researching a new series on remote helicopter pilots. I came across the words *Judas Collar* and learned that it was a tracking device where a single animal was used to betray the location of its herd in order for them to be tracked and shot from a helicopter.

It was a scientific device with a religious name.

“*I knew I had to tell this story and it couldn't wait. Less than forty-eight hours after encountering this story, I quit my full time job and started writing Judas Collar.*” — ALISON JAMES

I wrote four drafts of this story with a human central character. Making the decision to take the camel's perspective meant leaving behind words of any kind. It meant relying on the central performance of a camel and it was truly terrifying.

“*That a camel might become self-aware and sentence itself to a life of solitude for the betterment of its kind is such an incredible display of self-sacrifice that for me it transcends words.*” — ALISON JAMES

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“Incredible. Powerful. Sad. It made me cry. I don't know how the filmmakers pulled it off. It's so gut-wrenching.”

— BENDFILM INC

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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT CONT'D

Without dialogue for exposition, the story had to be incredibly clear and the camel's emotional journey had to be completely externalised. All craft elements would need to build on each other so that an audience might enter this strange desert world and connect with a camel.

As an audience, we can see that the Judas will only be a danger to the herd until the battery on her collar runs out – and yet she will never know that it is safe to return.

“ *To unwittingly cause pain to those you love most until you decide to live a life of loneliness is one of the saddest stories I have ever heard. And yet it's a story that is deeply and tragically human.* ”  
— ALISON JAMES

Sometimes we retreat to save the herd.





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# FILMING JUDAS COLLAR

“ *Over the six-day shoot we endured eight flat tires, two bogged vehicles and a broken down camel truck.*” — BROOKE SILCOX

*Judas Collar* is a non-dialogue but fully scripted narrative short that takes the point of view of a single camel. Alison and Brooke spent ten days scouring the desert for the most dramatic and emotive locations across Western Australia’s mid-west region.

“ *Adding to the challenge, director Alison James was four and a half months pregnant during the desert shoot, completing post-production at seven and a half months.*” — BROOKE SILCOX

Without any camel-wranglers in the state, the team turned to camel dairy farmer Chris O’Hora whose eight camels star in the film.

“ *The camels needed to perform without any ropes or harnesses – something they’d never done before and many camel experts said would be impossible.*” — ALISON JAMES

To direct the camel performances, lead camel Sonic was separated from the herd. The further away from the herd she was, the faster she would run back to them. Positioning the camera in between Sonic and the herd, we could capture the action inside the frame without ropes or harnesses.

“ *Without wanting to rely on visual effects, we had to safely transport eight domesticated camels as well as fencing, food and water to set – some sixteen hundred kilometres (1000 miles).*”  
— BROOKE SILCOX





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# FILMING JUDAS COLLAR CONT'D

We provided Sonic with eye-lines from other camels, called to her and rattled pellets to attract her attention and to get the performance we needed for the shot.

“ *The film was completely scripted and storyboarded. Some shots took four hours, others we got lucky on the first take.*”

— ALISON JAMES

In order to best capture the camel’s perspective, the camera needed to be at camel-height. Director of Photography Michael McDermott rigged a four-wheel drive vehicle with a front and rear MoVI unit, fitted with an ARRI ALEXA that meant the crew could drive alongside, behind or in front of the camels.

“ *Camels run at over 40kph (25 mph) and we had to keep up with them. We were traversing dry, dusty terrain, with rocks and low scrub, either making our own tracks or using tracks sometimes barely there, at speed.*” — DOP MICHAEL MCDERMOTT

The helicopter scenes in the film are all shot practically, without trick shots or VFX but of course no camels were harmed in any way.

Pilot Clint Archer was chosen for his incredible flying skills and as a real life camel musterer was able to bring an extra layer of authenticity to the story.

Editor Lawrie Silvestrin had the perfect background in drama and documentary, which meant he was able to look at footage with fresh eyes and repurpose small moments of footage to increase a scene’s emotional impact. His background as a sound editor on the film Babe helped build the vocalisations or ‘dialogue’ of the film.

With much of the location sound un-useable due to the crew having to call directions to the camels, sound recordist Jason North and designer Chris Goodes worked together to build the entire film soundscape from scratch.

Composer Ash Gibson Greig was an early collaborator on *Judas Collar* because without dialogue for exposition, music would be an integral part of the camel’s emotional journey. Cello felt the most representative of the camel’s journey and so the team limited themselves to a score that used only cello and supporting strings. Using live-cello recordings, the cello became a vital-part of Judas’s journey.

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“A conceptually highly ambitious but beautifully realised and emotive film that understands the essence of cinema, allowing the viewer to be swept away, to empathise and to experience life from a truly original perspective.”

— FILMINK





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# BEHIND THE SCENES CLIPS

*Judas Collar* involved incredible patience, innovation and talent from the team involved. Behind the Scenes clips detailing the film journey are below.



**CLIP 1:** “So no part of you read the script and went How the Hell are We Going to do this?”  
<https://vimeo.com/363754628>



**CLIP 2:** “Just a simple shot of a Camel”  
<https://vimeo.com/363756889>



**CLIP 3:** “Filming in the West Australian Outback”  
<https://vimeo.com/363760211>



**CLIP 4:** “Sonic — The Lead Camel”  
<https://vimeo.com/363761797>



**CLIP 5:** “How do you Coordinate 8 Camels, 15 Film Crew and a Helicopter in the Middle of the Desert?”  
<https://vimeo.com/363764174>

“Brilliant, wordless film will amaze you with its craft and break your heart with its storytelling.”

— BROOKLYN FILM FESTIVAL



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# CAMELS IN AUSTRALIA

“ *It’s a crime to cull in this manner. It’s a waste. Feral camels could actually be a valuable resource if they were managed responsibly. We should be looking into ways we can work with them for the betterment of all.*”

— CHRIS O’HORA, CAMEL WRANGLER

Outback Australia is home to many herds of wild camels. These one-hump dromedaries were introduced in the 1840s from British India and the Middle East to help build Australia’s desert infrastructure, including the cross-country rail system still in use today. After it was completed, the camels were set free and ultimately thrived in our harsh desert landscape.

**Australia is now home to the largest camel population in the world.**

In 2009, the Australian government started a 19 million dollar intensive Judas Collar program, designed to drastically cull the wild camel population, resulting in the shooting of a reported 160,000 camels. The animals had been causing damage to remote stations, trying to reach water during times of drought.

The Judas Collar program involves locating and tranquilising a wild camel and fitting it with a tracking collar. The collar sends a signal used to deploy hunters, generally by helicopter due to the vast and extremely remote areas travelled by the camels. The hunters shoot every camel in the herd except for the Judas camel who is left alive in order to lead hunters to other herds.

“Visual storytelling at its finest”

— CINEMA AUSTRALIA





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# CAMELS IN AUSTRALIA CONT'D

Judas Collars are particularly effective on camels, who are extremely social, community driven animals. After enough time has passed, the hunters return to cull the Judas Camel's new herd and this cycle continues until the collar's battery runs out or the Judas camel stops seeking out a new herd.

Judas Collars are also used on wild goats, donkeys, pigs and horses around the world.

In researching this production, the filmmakers spoke with many Australian camel industry experts and workers who were extremely opposed to the Judas Collars.

Internationally, Australian camels are considered extremely valuable because of their strong, protected gene pool and are exported to the Middle East for breeding, racing, leather, meat and dairy.

The camel experts felt the culling resulted in huge wastage of an incredibly sustainable, valuable resource and the extreme cost could be invested into the export or farming industry, creating jobs in remote areas. They also noted that the deaths of the camels had resulted in an increase in the feral dog population, which had a negative impact on native flora and fauna.

Above all, they all felt the practice was incredibly cruel on the Judas Camels and on the tens of thousands of camels killed.





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# DETAILED SYNOPSIS

In outback Western Australia, a feral camel munches on a native Australian bush and life in the red-rock valley rolls along as usual for the herd.

A scientist watches the camels from a ridge above and loads a tranquiliser dart into a rifle. He fires. Peace in the valley is momentarily broken. As the camel loses consciousness we see the scientist walking towards her, a black collar in hand.

The camel awakens to the sniffing of her young camel. She wears a black collar with a beacon that is flashing red. She re-joins the herd as if nothing has happened.

A helicopter travels through the bush with a receiver that also flashes red. An aerial is pointed out of the open chopper door. Silence in the valley is broken by the arrival of the helicopter and the camels run from the noise.

From the helicopter, a man – the hunter, pulls out a rifle and begins to fire at the camels below. The herd run for their lives but one by one they drop until it is only the collared camel – Judas, who is left alive. The hunter aims his rifle at Judas, sees her collar and doesn't fire.

The helicopter leaves the valley and we see the impact of the camel massacre. Judas is alone in a vast landscape. She mourns the loss of her herd, unable to move, unable to leave her home.

A gust of wind catches her attention and Judas sees a Lone Camel in the distance. She gets up and walks towards the figure, leaving the red rock valley behind her. Judas comes face to face with the Lone Camel, hoping for connection. The Lone Camel also wears a collar and upon seeing Judas, walks away into the bush, leaving her alone. Judas follows in the Lone Camel's direction.

Judas traverses a changing desert landscape, alone. Eventually she sees another herd in the distance on a vast salt lake. She approaches the camels and they welcome her into the herd.

The shadow of a helicopter shatters Judas' new life on the salt lake and we watch in slow motion as the herd is decimated by rifle-fire. Judas flees from the chopper until she is again, on her own.

Having walked through bush scrub as far as the eye can see, Judas comes across a third herd of camels in a valley below. She stands, torn, on top of the ridge. Still desperate for community, Judas now understands that she brings with her the horror of the helicopter. She turns and walks away from the herd.

Walking alone, Judas hears a sound and turns around. Behind her is the Lone Camel. We now understand that the Lone Camel has made the same sacrifice as Judas – she has resigned herself to a life alone to protect the other camels. Tragically, we see that her collar has long stopped working and she is no longer a threat.

Still acting out of protection, Judas decides to walk on, alone.



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# BIOGRAPHIES

## ALISON JAMES — Writer/Director

Represented by WME and Grandview in Los Angeles, Alison is an award-winning drama director and writer working between West Hollywood and Perth, Western Australia. Alison thrives on adventure and seeks to tell bold, original stories. She is currently developing two feature projects; a US action-survival film and an Australian-set dramatic thriller.

For her work on *Judas Collar*, Alison was awarded the Australian Writer's Guild Award (AWGIE) for Best Short Film and won Best Director at St Kilda Film Festival. She also received an Australian Directors Guild Award nomination and a Special Jury Mention for Best Director at the Sydney Film Festival. *Judas Collar* follows up on two performance-based shorts *You Have Blue Eyes* and *Sentence*, filmed in West Australia's only juvenile prison.

Prior to her scripted work Alison directed over fifty hours of factual television for Discovery, National Geographic, ABC, SBS and the BBC, filming in China, Honduras, Germany, England, Ireland, Iceland and the USA. Highlights include working with Indigenous Elders, oil and gas workers, multi-millionaire entrepreneurs, people with intellectual disabilities, Nobel winning scientists, migrants, refugees, prisoners and survivors of terrorism and war.

She also filmed alongside Australia's toughest truck-drivers in remote and punishing desert conditions as a field director on twenty-four episodes of *Outback Truckers*.





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# BIOGRAPHIES CONT'D

## BROOKE TIA SILCOX — Producer

Brooke is an award-winning drama and documentary producer who left her job as a Banking and Finance Lawyer to start the production company No Thing Productions, working to highlight humanitarian causes and the importance of the arts.

Brooke has three degrees, in Fine Arts; Communication, Cultural & Performances Studies and Law, having studied in Perth, Melbourne and Oxford.

Brooke won the ScreenWest Emerging Producer Prize of \$100,000 in recognition of her work, was selected as one of Screen Producer's Australia's "Ones to Watch" and won the prestigious Brian Beaton Award in recognition of social impact through film.

Brooke has produced two feature documentaries; *Rockabul* (Nominated Best Australian Documentary, Sydney Film Festival and winner Best Music Documentary, Arizona Film Festival) and *Meal Tickets* (Winner Best Australian Documentary, Melbourne Documentary Film Festival). She also produced two online series for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation; *Home: The Art of Ian Strange* and *The Bad Guy: Abdul Abdullah*. Brooke associate produced the feature film *Jirga*, which was Australia's Academy Awards submission for Best Foreign Film in 2019 and winner of Australia's Richest Film Prize (\$100,000) at Cinefest Oz.

Brooke paid for law school by working in the art department on large-scale productions *The Knowing*, *Blessed*, *The Killer Elite*, *The Turning* and Australian series *Winners and Losers*.





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# BIOGRAPHIES CONT'D



## **MICHAEL McDERMOTT** Director of Cinematography

Represented by Gersh in Los Angeles, Michael is a multi-award winning career cinematographer with more than thirty years of industry experience. His career began in Perth, Western Australia where he was born and raised and has taken him across the world. Michael has lensed five feature films as Cinematographer.

He was recently nominated for Best Cinematography at the Film Critics Circle of Australia and the Australian Academy Awards (AACTAs) for the feature film *Hounds of Love* (dir. Ben Young), which premiered in competition at the Venice Film Festival.



## **LAWRIE SILVESTRIIN ASE** Editor

Lawrie has worked as a drama and documentary picture and sound editor for over thirty years. During that time he has been nominated for nine AFI/AACTA Awards winning two for Best Editing and two for Best Sound, including the movie *Babe*. Many of the films he has edited have gone on to win awards all over the world.

Lawrie has been awarded ASE Accreditation for his many editing achievements and his years of service to the screen editing community culminating at the 2016 West Australian Screen Awards where he was awarded the ScreenWest Outstanding Contribution To The Industry Award.





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# CREDITS ROLL

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY  
**Alison James**

PRODUCED BY  
**Brooke Tia Silcox**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS  
**Aidan O'Bryan**  
**Jessica Mitchell**  
**Roslyn Walker**  
**Janelle Landers**

DIRECTOR OF  
CINEMATOGRAPHY  
**Michael McDermott**

EDITOR  
**Lawrie Silvestrin ASE**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**Chris Goodes**

COMPOSER  
**Ash Gibson Greig**

CAMELS  
**Sonic**  
**Buddha**  
**Snowy**  
**Claudia**  
**Ebony**  
**Wasim**  
**Zara**  
**Petra**

SCIENTIST  
**Rory Dax Paton**

HUNTER  
**Dave Norton-Wood**

PILOT  
**Clint Archer**

KEY GRIP  
**Clint Lawrence**

SOUND RECORDIST  
**Jason North**

FOCUS PULLER &  
DATA WRANGLER  
**Paolo Feliciano**

GRIP & SAFETY ASSISTANT  
**Sahra Miller**

ARMOURER  
**Dave Norton-Wood**

INDIGENOUS CONSULTANTS  
**Ollie George**  
**Carole Minney**

STILLS  
**Jessica Ferguson**

PROPS MAKERS  
**Tim Courtland**  
**Phoebe Tran**

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT  
**Chantall Victor**

ASSISTANT EDITOR  
**Saxon Wright**

STORYBOARDS  
**Cherish Marrington**

ART DEPARTMENT ASSISTANT  
**Rory Dax Paton**

CAMEL WRANGLERS  
**Calamunnda Camel Farm**  
**Chris O'Hora**  
**Shannon Batt**  
**Natasha Viknaswaran**  
**Renee Chiu**

CAMEL CONSULTANT  
**Kamah! Druesne**

VEHICLE SUPPORT  
**Sam James**  
**Jamie Quinlan**

HELICOPTER PILOT  
**Clint Archer**  
**C.A. Helicopters**

UAV REMOTE PILOT  
**Jason North**

CO-COMPOSER & CELLIST  
**Tristen Parr**

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
**Ashley Doodkorte**

VISUAL EFFECTS  
**Double Barrel VFX**

VFX SUPERVISOR  
**Nathan Stone**

VFX PRODUCER  
**Stuart Campbell**

POST PRODUCTION FACILITY  
**Edge DP**

FACILITY MANAGER  
**Anthos Simon**

ONLINE  
**Morgan Lawless**

COLOURIST  
**Olivier Fontenay**

POST SOUND FACILITY  
**Soundfirm**

POST SOUND PRODUCER  
**Helen Field**

FOLEY EDITORS  
**Mario Vaccaro**  
**Michael Grisold**

LEGALS  
**Joan Peters**  
**Luci Silvestrin**

INSURANCE  
**Craig Shand**

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“One of the coolest films you’ll see all year. An amazing visual experience. I would put money down on it being an Oscar finalist.”

— *UNSEEN FILMS NYC*

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# CREDITS ROLL CONT'D

## WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Zak Hilditch • HD Rentals: Michael Elsegood, Greg Stirling • Shire of Mount Magnet: Edwin Walter Piper PSM, Patrick O'Brien, Bill Atyeo • Mount Magnet Visitor Centre: Wendy O'Brien, Karen Morrissey OAM, Kevin Brand • Shire of Sandstone: Harry Hawkins CEO, Beth Walton, Shire President • Shire of Cue • Locations: Di Pepper, Ted & Lecky Mahoney • Murchison Earthmoving & Rehabilitation Pty Ltd • Paynes Find Road House: Kathrin Otto & Doug Taylor, Terry Atterton • Collars: Peter Spencer, Andrew Longbottom, Caleb Troy, Mark Lethbridge • Northside Rentals: Pierrick le Flochmoan • Queen of the Murchison: Joyce & Darryl • Gekkos: John & John • Miners Rest: Jim Nash • Outback Accommodation: Mickey Evans • Sandstone National Hotel: Donna Bennett • Catering: Gemma Poli • Art Department Consultants: Emma Fletcher, Pierce Davison, Murray Edwards • Screenwest: Seph McKenna, Rikki Lee Bestall, Matthew Horrocks, Wendy Simmons, Georgia Landre-Ord • Travis Beard, Haley Gillies, Maziar Lahooti, Mike Hoath, Mick Montague, Nancy James, Adele Silcox, Liz Kearney, Cassey Mays, Antony Webb, Steve Vojkavic, Ric Curtin, Gerald Lillywhite, Pete Gleeson, Melissa Hayward, Merlin Eden, Sandy George • The Backlot Perth: Ian Hale

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