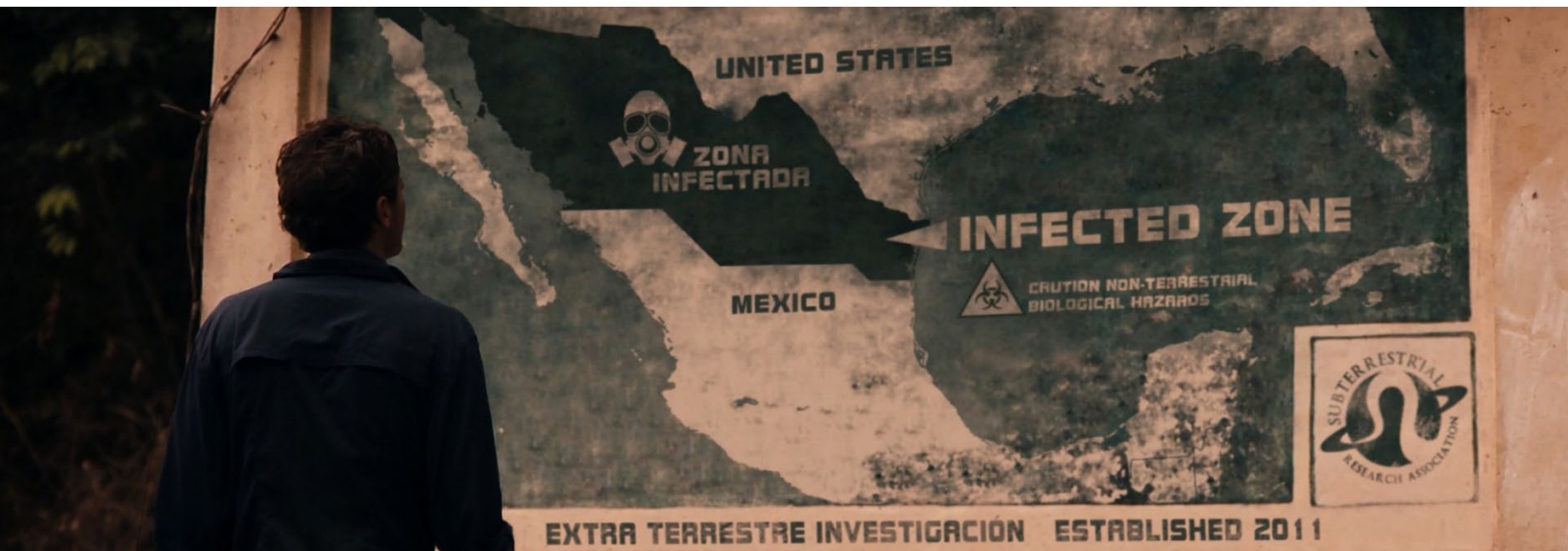


Gareth Edwards/*Monsters*

## Movie-making ingenuity



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Award-winning visual effects artist Gareth Edwards creates critically acclaimed indie film *Monsters* with Adobe® Creative Suite® Production Premium software

Growing up, Gareth Edwards borrowed his father's family video camera and set about making short films with his friends. His early love of filmmaking charted a course for a career that has culminated in the release of his first independent film—the sci-fi road movie, *Monsters*.

Edwards wrote, directed, and single-handedly created 250 visual effects (VFX) for *Monsters*, working alongside his editor. The tiny team created a groundbreaking movie with high production value that incorporates a compelling story, a low-cost filmmaking process and toolset, and exceptional talent. Shot on Sony EX3 cameras, the film was edited with Edwards creating hundreds of VFX shots using just two PCs and Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium software.

"I always wanted to be a film director, but out of paranoia that it might never happen I got hold of a copy of Adobe After Effects® and started to learn how to use it. It seemed that even if Hollywood never called, this software could still allow you to create an epic looking movie all 'from your bedroom,'" he says. "Many years later after a career in computer graphics, I decided the time had come to finally put these skills to use and set out to make my first feature film, *Monsters*."

Equal parts sci-fi, road movie, and romance, *Monsters* tells the story of a U.S. journalist who escorts a shaken tourist through an "infected zone" in Mexico. Created using Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium software, the movie has achieved multiple awards and attained theatrical distribution.



### Challenge

- Create a high production-value film on a shoestring budget
- Work seamlessly with tapeless camera formats and HD footage
- Save time and effort in moving among software applications
- Develop 250 effects shots in minimal time
- Maintain creative control

### Solution

- Pre-visualize shots using Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium
- Work seamlessly between Adobe After Effects and Adobe Photoshop to create visual effects
- Edit film using Adobe Premiere Pro
- Leverage integration among components of Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium

### Benefits

- Created high-quality effects in an hour or less
- Avoided complex post-production workflows
- Leveraged integration among Adobe tools to stay in the creative flow
- Cut costs and enabled rapid post-production
- Surpassed high-end, post-production equipment
- Independently created 250 shots
- Maintained creative control

### A mix of movie genres

In *Monsters*, Edwards tells a compelling story. The premise: years ago, NASA discovered the possibility of life within our solar system. A probe was launched to collect samples, but crashed upon reentry over Central America. New life forms began to appear and half of Mexico was quarantined as an infected zone. Today, the American and Mexican militaries struggle to contain the creatures. The story begins when a U.S. journalist agrees to escort a shaken American tourist through the infected zone in Mexico to the safety of the U.S. border.

The film, produced by Vertigo Films in the United Kingdom, garnered rave reviews as well as U.S. and international theatrical distribution deals after its premier at the South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival. It has since been deemed an "official choice" at the Los Angeles Film Festival 2010 and the Toronto International Film Festival 2010. It screened at the Cannes Festival as well.

"The hardest question I get asked is, 'What is the film about?'" says Edwards. "I see it as a mix of road-trip movie, love story, and monster movie, and it doesn't end when the creature has been killed like in King Kong or Godzilla. Instead, living with monsters is an everyday occurrence for the characters in the film."

### Small budget, big film

Before beginning work on *Monsters*, Edwards had already carved out a successful career as a BAFTA-award winning and Emmy-nominated visual effects creator for clients such as The Discovery Channel and the BBC. His series include *Attila the Hun*, *7 Wonders of the Industrial World*, and *Space Race*. He decided the time had come to embark on his own feature and capitalize on his well-honed CGI skills, and combine it with a simple approach to filmmaking that would allow him to create the film without a big crew.

"There's so much competition in the film industry and so many people want to be filmmakers in our generation, I didn't feel as if an opportunity was going to come to me," says Edwards. "At the same time, I didn't want to have to wait for someone to come along and give me the money or permission to make a film. So I was just trying to think of an idea that I could fund and create on my own as inexpensively as possible."

Edwards shot the film in Texas, Mexico, and Central America over a period of six weeks with six people: himself and sound expert Ian Maclagan; actors Scoot McNairy and Whitney Able; and two on-site producers—Jim Spencer and Verity Oswin. They picked locations and shot them as they found them with little or no specific plan or preparation.

Gareth Edwards is a BAFTA-Award winning and Emmy-nominated visual effects creator. His mainstay toolset is Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium software. *Monsters* is his first independent film.

Edwards designed the sea-like creatures in the film using 3D software and Adobe Photoshop. He brought them into Adobe After Effects for compositing and animation.



*"For Monsters, I used full cinema resolution at true high definition. I could scrub the timeline in Adobe After Effects, and it was like liquid. It flowed perfectly and we did not have to wait long to see renders."*

**Gareth Edwards**  
Filmmaker

### **Integration keeps the schedule on track**

The extensive post-production process began at Vertigo's offices. There, Edwards used Adobe video software to edit the footage and create the effects shots, coordinating with his editor, Colin Goudie. According to Edwards, Adobe Premiere® Pro software supported a tapeless workflow that simplified the ingest process. Edwards imported the same footage directly from his editor's timeline and set up linked Adobe After Effects projects where he could create rough versions of each shot for pre-visualization that automatically updated in the final film.

"For *Monsters*, I used full cinema resolution at true high definition," he says. "I could scrub the timeline in Adobe After Effects, and it was like liquid. It flowed perfectly and we did not have to wait long to see renders."

When he could see how each shot flowed into the next, Edwards began creating the final effects, working back and forth between Adobe Photoshop® Extended and After Effects software and reviewing the shots in the Adobe Premiere Pro sequence. Starting with images of deep-sea creatures, he designed the tentacled, bioluminescent aliens that are featured in the film using 3D software and Adobe Photoshop, which he ultimately brought into After Effects.

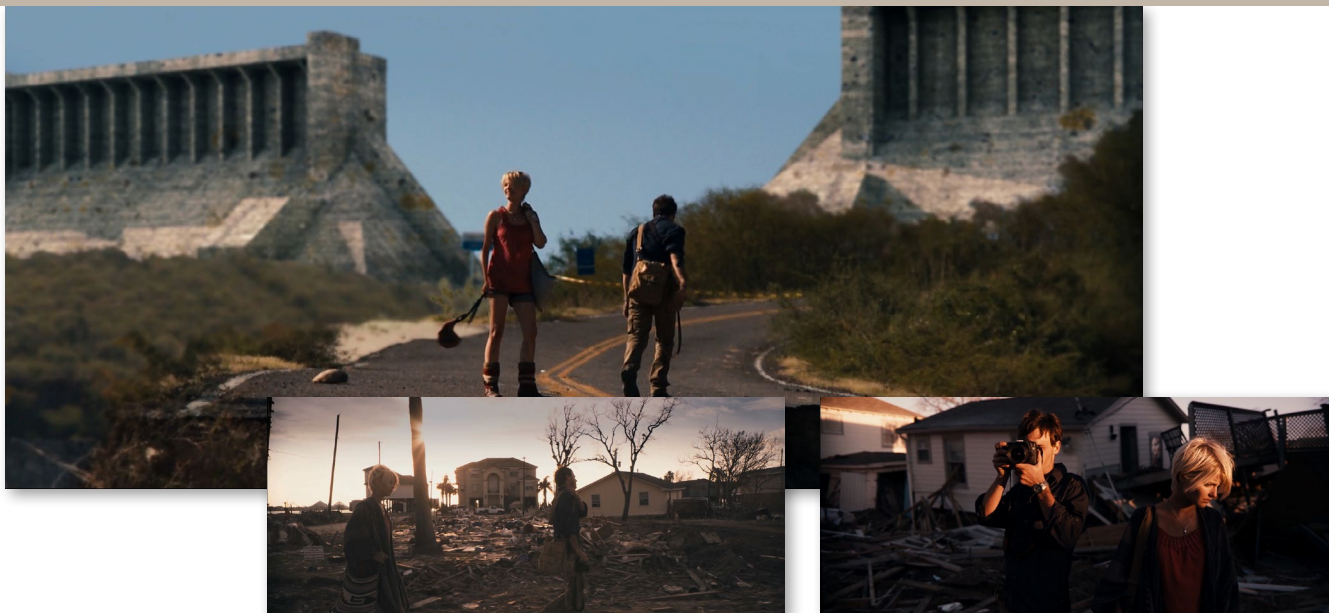
For the wide variety of creature warning signs that set the stage throughout the movie, Edwards started with a shot of a real sign and then used layers in Photoshop to remove the original text while leaving the weathering on top. This enabled him to design new signs that looked aged and like part of the natural environment. Any further changes made in Photoshop were instantly updated in After Effects. According to Edwards, moving and editing assets among software applications—a major challenge in some workflows—is easy with Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium. He adds that he can work far faster and better using Adobe's integrated toolset than if he had chosen much more expensive tools.

"Colin and I each had a computer, networked through a fast optical connection," he explains. "As he created scenes and edited them together, I could open the same projects on my computer and start chipping away at pre-vis or effects. That's what's great about Adobe Premiere Pro—I can open the scene that's cut, right click, and send it to After Effects through Dynamic Link. Our first shot was done in literally half an hour, and people thought it was a live shot, not an effect."

### **Extensive effects in minutes**

These days, Edwards says he rarely even thinks about how he is using Adobe's tools because they are such a natural extension of the way he works. "The great thing about Adobe's tools is the way they interlink," he says. "And what's fantastic is that I can take advantage of that. I take minimal time on every shot—literally an hour or less some of the time—and get beautiful and realistic results. A lot of the pre-vis in this film ended up being the final shot, because it was just as quick to do the final version as it was the temporary version. I ended up calling them 'post-vis' shots."

Edwards created over 250 visual effects shots for *Monsters* using Adobe Photoshop Extended and Adobe After Effects. He used Adobe Dynamic Link to exchange updates with his editor, who was using Adobe Premiere Pro—all through an integrated workflow that eliminated intermediate rendering.



*"That's what's great about Adobe Premiere Pro—I can open the scene that's cut, right click, and send it to After Effects through Dynamic Link. Our first shot was done in literally half an hour, and people thought it was a live shot, not an effect."*

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#### Toolkit

Adobe Creative Suite Production Premium. Components used include:

- Adobe After Effects
- Adobe Premiere Pro
- Adobe Photoshop Extended
- Dynamic Link

Platform: Microsoft® Windows® XP running on 64-bit laptop computers

#### For more information

[www.adobe.com/products/creativesuite/production](http://www.adobe.com/products/creativesuite/production)  
[www.adobe.com/solutions/professionalvideo](http://www.adobe.com/solutions/professionalvideo)

To further improve quality, Edwards used mocha for After Effects for planar motion tracking. He notes that there is always something to be painted in or rubbed out. "mocha was a lifesaver," says Edwards, "Because it let us preserve beautiful depth of field, with everything in focus or out of focus, depending on the need. With mocha, you can just draw a shape and it sticks to the image, even when it's out of focus, and then exports that movement perfectly into After Effects."

Having grown up with films like *Jurassic Park*, *ET*, and other Spielberg classics, Edwards wanted to make "the most realistic monster film ever". Using Adobe tools, he's in full creative control and has achieved his dream of creating a full-length feature film, has won three British Independent Film Awards, won Best New Director at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, and has been garnering coverage in outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Sun*—with more acclaim to come.



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