

Talisha Weston Final Major Project Report

Dead Radio

Introduction

The key purpose of this report is to explore and evaluate my work throughout my major project, in my selected specialisms. I will be analytically exploring the ways i've directed and overlooking the editing process of my production 'Dead Radio', the project that's started being developed in September 2017. Back then the original concept was a horror spoof and It has slowly been worked into the creation it is now. I had never really been keen on directing, but the more the script was being worked on I knew what I wanted it to be, and didn't enjoy the idea of handing it to someone else.

I was fortunate to approach the start of this module with a pretty solid idea, but I knew I was being ambitious with the genre, even though myself and co-writer Tom Williams had explored tests and workshopped ideas in previous months I knew this was going to be a team effort. The horror theme and sci-fi feel was going to be a challenge, blatantly with resources and budget. But fortunately knowing others with bold talent, this project simply couldn't be done with me alone and I needed to focus on my role as the director and editor, and simply overlook where i'm needed to make sure my vision is coming together. After securing realistic dates, I was able to pitch the idea to potential crew and cast based in the university. I was fortunate to have a lot of positive response and people interested in taking part. I was very specific in what I wanted from my crew as a director and what was required from each member.

Directing

In regards to my specialism, that being Directing. I want to express myself in a new role and one out of my comfort zone. I believe i dealt really well with the almost unknown and threw myself into it. I was extremely passionate about the script and became attached. This film wasn't going to be made if i wasn't the person directing it. I ensured to involve



myself hard with the key departments that needed the directors direction, and insured that me and them were happy with our way forward. This move would be fairly standard as a director and would be foolish not to.

Throughout this project i was able to see myself develop as a new director i was, as much as experiencing it all for this first time, i was able to see which direction i wanted to take things in regards to locations, talent, and showing the genre. I made sure to focus a lot of my time on the key scenes. That being the opening, the part where all the characters are arguing about whether to go home or not, and when Mike and Harry are running together in the forest. Within all films there are key narrative points that help guide the story. The opening scene where we first meet the characters is important because here is where i'm able to establish them and their personalities right away. As much as the script does that, i needed to film in a way to show this and their 'quirks' what they were going to bring in each scene later on. The scene where they are quite tense about going into the forest was hard to plan as i knew it was going to be fast pace but thinking where the camera was going to go in the tight space was stressful. On set this was a problem, as expected, but we coped well and gave ourselves enough time to do what we could, i decided to keep the camera in one place but quickly pan back and forth each character, making the audience almost feel as though they are the camera and feel the panic. It was important for the audience to feel what the characters are in this moment. Another scene that made my mark as a director on was the scene where Mike and Harry are trying to run away from the farmer. Visualising this being done in my head was that i didn't want to break it up and i wanted it to all be done in one. I knew this was going to be a challenge for the DOP but i expressed my concern about not breaking up this moment and i made this choice multiple times throughout Dead Radio. Again with the 360' of Amy looking for James, and then again with Amy in the campervan for the last scene. I as the director refused to break up these scenes as they are core moments and the use of a log take is how i wanted to express the moment with no distractions.

I decided to make this film as it is something completely out of my comfort zone. I'm not a huge fan of horror and gore, but i really wanted to do something that wasn't safe. I wanted it to be a challenge and force myself to create something different and unexpected. During this i was able to test my skills i had and work on the ones i didn't. I felt i had enough experience to go through the production and the entire set experience and i enjoyed learning about myself as a director. It was great to explore the genre and the almost unknown, i wanted to put a little twist on the genre by incorporating unusual elements. *"I do not always know what i want, but i do know what i don't want"* - Stanley Kubrick. This has been a passion project for some time and i've worked on the story for a couple of years, and i felt that now was the right time to make it. I didn't feel i was going to have the opportunity to be a director and have the chance to work with a great crew on my one story with all the facilities i had again any time soon. I'm very pleased with the outcome.

I wanted to tackle this genre as i wanted to try something different, i wanted to explore the genre and see what i could do with it. Horror has many typical conventions in place which i wanted to analyse and challenge. Conventions such as harsh lighting, quick cuts and the use of building tension with sound. Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is a perfect example of all these elements. With Dead Radio i decided to go against the conventions of filming a

horror film at night and filmed the night scenes during the day so this gave me the more freedom with the lighting conditions while creating the day for night colour grade. With regards to sound i did follow the horror conventions such as adding rising tensing within the background noises and also asking a friend i know from in industry to compose a score for my film, which added to the films overall tone and really expressed the genre of horror. The DOP for my film was informed that i wasn't very fond of the horror cliques with camera movement, them typically being POV running shots, extreme low angels and multiple jump scares, where as i did not stray away from this too far as my film does contain two jumpscars which were well fitted with the scene, so we worked on making it more of a cinematic thriller when doing the shot list together.

In the pre-production phase i needed to gather my crew that i was happy with. I believe i had a very strong crew and this reflected on the end product. There was a lot of stress during this time as most members were in my class and had their own projects going on the same time. This is why i was first to set my filming dates, just to ensure it would be less likely for people be unavailable and each head of department had enough time to do what was required. I wanted people interested in the project and were keen on making it a success, i was happy with the vast majority of my crew but the ones i wasn't too sure on didn't seem to be doing their assigned role to the best of their ability and what i expected from them. The scene where the characters are arguing within the campervan could of been done better and more quickly if the 1AC was present to focus pull and was not being a potential distraction to other crew members from their jobs. I was extremely happy with how the film was captured, my DOP did an amazing job of perfectly shooting what i had envisioned for the final look of the film, after the film was shot i asked for his opinion of my directing.

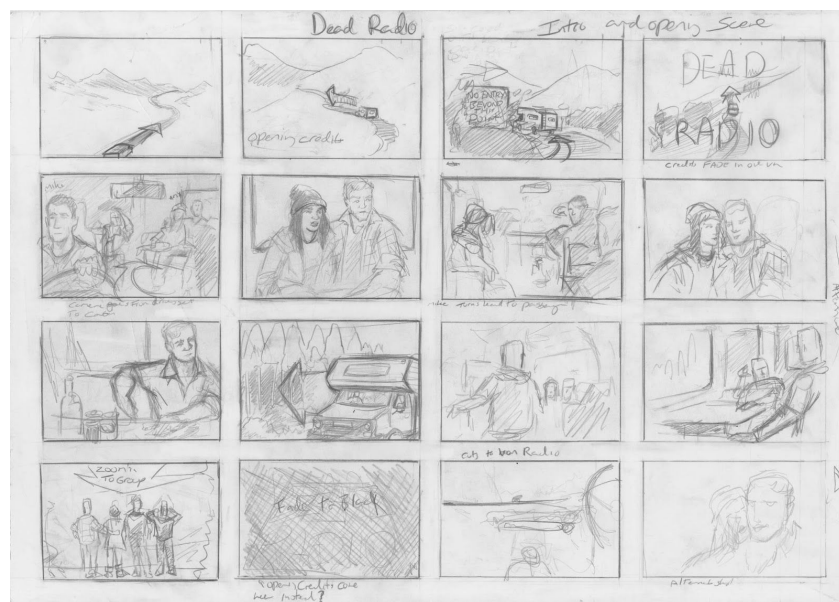
"your set has definitely been one of the best i've worked over the last 4 years, your set was incredibly organised, the core set experience was really professional and i never felt i wasn't working toward your vision" - Benjamin-Martyn Wheeler (Camera Operator, Dead Radio 2019)

I was so pleased to get such positive feedback from my first directing, the only negative part about the set i was told about was the weather. I believe both days ran as smooth as i could have planned and the only blips were beyond my control. Over the production process of the film i believe i have developed my skills a lot and i feel like i have become more confident in my ability to create a film from the ground up, and i will be happy to continue working on this film to refine any edges to make it more suitable to distribute, if need be. I now will feel more confident to go through this experience again and maybe start working towards another film in the foreseeable future.

The film i created with the help of my co-writer Tom Williams was inspired by the 80s, it was meant to have a subtle feel toward that decade similarly to Netflix's *Sex Education*, we added in nods like the clothing choices, makeup styles and even the radio itself was a radio from the 80s so it fitted the overall theme and set for the film along with the 1979 Campervan. While working on this film, we took a lot of visual inspiration and stylistic choices from the Netflix show *Stranger Things*, Netflix is a great platform to look into when making a film as it modern and relevant to a lot of today's audiences; making my film have a purpose

to be made. The show (*Stranger Things*) is also a horror based in the 80's so it was a nice insight into the look and feel of that kind of genre. The 80's were full of classic horror movies but the *Stranger Things* show was a nice more modern look into the 80s themes, i didn't want the 80s feel to be over the top either so we created a more subtle looking set with small elements.

During the development i also had a kind aid from a friend of mine in illustration, Daniel Phillips, who helped me design the film's storyboards, and due to his talent, they were very easy to read visually. Which in return helped out my DOP out when it came to actually shooting on the day. Again with the feel i wanted to focus on making it more of a cinematic horror film rather than making it fairly standard, that being the aforementioned POV shots, which is heavily shown in films such as *The Blair Witch Project*, i wanted to avoid this look entirely and with the help from Dan Phillips and Ben Wheeler i was able to start pulling together a very decent visual style for the script that i had written, this made the end product more of a success.



I edited this film because i wanted to also focus some my efforts into the final cut of the film and i felt like handing my film over to someone after i had come this far with it was a slight unstrategic move when i'm a fairly confident editor. I wanted to follow the typical three narrative story arc, which this film clearly shows, but i added in a open ending at the very end so as to have a cliffhanger, i was recommended to do this because after read through i had early on in the production. It seemed to have a better response from the cliffhanger ending rather than the character Amy escaping or dying. Editing with music was a new challenge for me because i had never had a score written for one of my films before, it was a lot more pleasant to see the final edit with music and it also made the film seem a lot fuller because of the added element. Editing a horror is something that i can say i found very difficult, the fear of it not being pulled off was a constant worry and as the editor you very quickly get used to what's going to happen. So the horror side wore of extremely quick, and i constantly needed feedback off new people with fresh eyes. I also needed to have the final edit done quickly to hand over to the sound mixer and vfx artist.

Conclusion

To sum up this report on Dead Radio, i'm extremely happy with the outcome of my film and the what felt like endlessness is now over. It was a very challenging time with a mixture of joy and dispise, but it all feels worth it. There are only a few changes i would made to this production and all are budget depended. I would gather more crew within the post production and add an extra two filming days. Just to relieve some stress off core crew members. I look forward to my next project and hope i have the similar conclusion next time.