

How do you shoot a film during a pandemic?

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Introduction

Traditionally on a film set there is a large cast and crew that work closely with each other in order to deliver a great final project. But what if one day we aren't allowed to work as we did? During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, every industry asked themselves this question. The film industry delayed countless projects from going into production to stop the spread of COVID-19. But what if you still needed to shoot a film? How would you film a movie while also adhering to social distancing guidelines and public gathering restrictions? These were problems I had to solve while filming *Fetch*.

Fetch is a narrative cyberpunk short film. In *Fetch*, set in the near distant future, an Amazon-like mega-corporation has become a monopoly in all forms of commerce. With all sales outside the company illegalized, people who need outlawed products turn to an underground network of sellers. The people who deliver these outlawed products are known as "fixers". In *Fetch* we see one night in the life of Peggy, a fixer completing her assigned tasks while being pursued by a mysterious figure.



Figure 1. A color corrected still frame of Hannah playing the character Peggy.

Adhering to social distancing guidelines and public gathering restrictions meant that the cast and crew had to be kept to a minimum. The script was written to only have two actors at most on screen the same time. The script was also written so that there was minimal dialogue. This made production easier as only foley sounds needed to be recorded. There are a total of three cast members and the crew consisted of only one member, myself.



Figure 2. Cast of the film. The script of the film was written with Hannah in mind to play the main character. Nicholas was a welcome recasting as the original actor for Linus dropped out.

In terms of personal protective equipment, all cast and crew wore masks when they weren't being filmed. Hand sanitizer was readily available to everyone when we were shooting outside. The cast remained six feet apart with their masks on whenever we weren't filming. This policy is standard practice for working in 2020.

Materials and methods (cont.)

Storyboarding for the film helped immensely as it was easy and quick to compose shots according to the framing established in the storyboard.

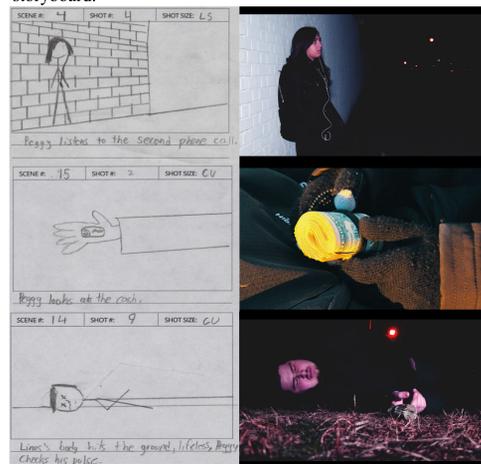


Figure 3. Storyboard images side by side with shot footage.

The camera rig was designed so that I could operate it all by myself and have full control of the lighting and visuals.



Figure 4. The Camera Rig was designed so that everything about the shot could be controlled by one person at one time. The camera is a Canon 250D with an 18-55mm lens. The camera is mounted on top of a YELANGU S60T Stabilizer. On top of the camera is an adjustable VILTROX L116T RA CRI95 LED Light. This entire rig allowed for stabilized shooting and adjustable lighting on the go.

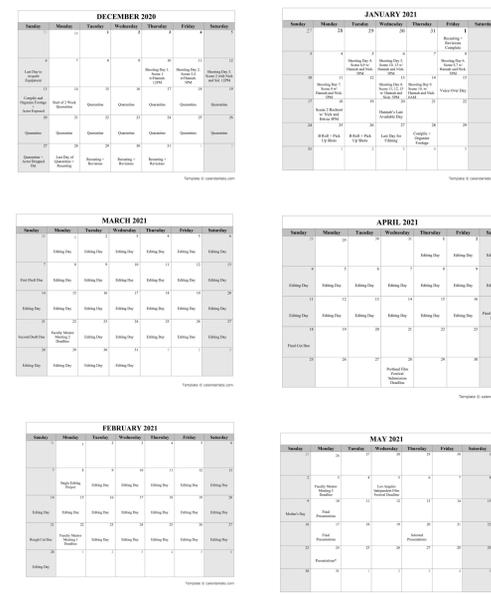
Materials and Methods (cont.)

Budgeting the film meant taking into inventory everything needed to even start production. The entire budget was paid for, out of pocket as I wanted to invest in these materials for future projects.

Quantity	Deliverable	Equipment	Unit Cost	Extended Cost	
1	Camera	Canon EOS REBEL SL3 with EF-S 18-55mm Lens	\$649		\$649
1	Camera(Lens)	Canon EF 50mm f/1.8 STM Lens	\$125		\$125
1	Trippod	Wross 61-inch Trippod	\$49		\$49
1	Stabilizer	YELANGU Handheld DSLR Camera Stabilizer	\$90		\$90
2	Microphone	Audio-Technica ATR-6550	\$45		\$90
1	Boompole	AmazonBasics Tripod Boom Microphone Stand	\$23		\$23
2	Light	VILTROX L116T RA CRI95	\$45		\$90
1	Editing Computer	15-inch MacBook Pro	\$2,899		\$2,899
1	Editing Software	Adobe Premiere Pro	\$240		\$240
1	Animation Software	Adobe After Effects			\$240
1	Headphones	Audio-Technica ATH-M50x	\$129		\$129
				Subtotal:	\$4,384
				5% Hardware Estimate:	\$219
				Subtotal:	\$4,603
				10% Contingency:	\$460.32
				Total:	\$5,064

Figure 5. The budget came out to a subtotal of \$4,384 with the total coming out to \$5,064 with the contingencies taken into account. The most notable item is the new computer purchased for the project for \$2,899.

The calendar for production and post production spanned six months, starting from in December 2020 and ending in May 2021.



Results

The result of the project was an eleven and half minute short film that largely followed the script and storyboard. The post production of the film took four months and possible reshoots are considered in the future before submitting to any film festivals.

Conclusions

The project was an entire year in the making. From the original script being written to the final cut being finished, the entire process took a year and four months.

Things I learned were how to manage time, how to color correct and most importantly, how to design a film's sound design. The classes I had taken during this semester helped out immensely. These two classes being Sound Design and Sound for Multimedia. Both of which helped me create sounds from scratch in order to fill out the film's world.

For future projects, I would tighten up certain aspects of my projects. For example, I would try to be better prepared for shoots by making sure we could work in the environment. In this case, the shooting conditions were very cold and the cast and crew suffered as a result. For future projects I would shoot during warmer months to minimize problems on set and with equipment.

Acknowledgments

1. Hannah Mariani
2. Nicholas Mallios
3. Brivia Bobby
4. Ryoya Terao

For further information

1. <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/amarsanthosh-cu-imation/>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPf3ARt2mN8>