

## Zenith Reflection

The original reflection below was written before this project was complete (as I was ridiculously overdue). As of now, it is actually complete, so I'll add on a bit. This project isn't perfect; there are some glaring issues in sound mixing (and obvious ones in audio quality), as well as a poorly structured narrative. I am my own worst critic, but it's mainly a result of me changing the scope of my project on a whim. With my energy being dwindling as it was back in April and early May, it was relieving that a certain aspect of the project had me intrigued and took over as the main focus— that of course being sound design.

Ironically the audio of the mock interviews is downright terrible, but that itself is a result of me straying away from the documentary part. I didn't want to do that anymore. I just wanted to do the two major scenes. So the rest of the film is just awkward dry fluff around the parts I enhanced, since isolating the scenes wouldn't make sense and I didn't care about the rest of the documentary. That sounds harsh, and while it is slightly harsh, I'm really proud and satisfied with the audio work I did in those two aforementioned scenes. It's not perfect, but if it was perfect, it wouldn't be complete.

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At the time of writing this, I actually have not finished my Zenith project. I'll get back to that later, but at this point in the year, the Zenith project is over, and there's very little left to do for my project anyway, so I feel that it's entirely fair to reflect on the process at this point in time.

Zenith was essentially meant to be a grand finale for our Freestyle careers in which we showed off whatever we wanted and made the project our own. In a way, that does end up putting a lot of pressure on you to go out with a bang and do something new and creative that will leave your mark and make you proud. Of course it doesn't have to be that way, but it does make you feel like you can't afford to screw this up.

Senior Narrative had a similar pressure to not screw it up, and for the final 2 months all the way to the bitter end of it I felt that I did screw it up and I wanted it very far behind me so I could start anew and maybe get it right this time.

I found that what I really truly enjoyed during Senior Narrative was simply filming shots that looked good. I loved framing them, adjusting the focus and lighting, racking focus, and coming up with creative dynamic tracking shots, especially with the Steadicam. My main flaw in that category is that I couldn't stand any shot that didn't have some sort of depth to it, and didn't like having the background in focus. I rarely did wide shots because they were always ugly and especially hard to pull off with our lenses. But I really loved some of what I was able to do.

I wasn't so great at direction or organization, and I didn't enjoy commanding others or keeping them focused. And I'm terrible at reaching out to anyone. So for my Zenith, I didn't want find that overcoming that difficulty was worth it, and instead settled for a simple 2 person scene written specifically to be possible to film entirely at my house with little crew. That's not to say that I don't like being around other people; it's just overwhelming for me. I preferred to appeal to my insecurities and weaknesses rather than face them head-on this time around, and focus on my strengths. So I designed my project to be entirely about those strengths, and after the hellish struggle of coming up with an idea, I settled for a film of 2 people discovering a "film board" that would adjust different aspects of a scene with sliders, such as lighting, tone, color palette, pacing, creativity of shots, and that sort of thing. My favorite idea from that was to start off by using my own personal point-and-shoot camera to make it a flat, uninspired and ugly looking scene entirely on a tripod using camera audio. They would then turn up the "professionalism" slider upon finding the board and the Freestyle equipment would be used from there on out.

I struggled to come up with a script and keep it from being too focused on a narrative, but eventually I did begin writing one that I still quite like (though I did cut the ugly camera gag). I was worried about being able to handle coming up with a schedule for filming and actually beginning the production process, but the good news is that I never got that far. Within only two weeks of starting, a little something happened that made it so I could no longer film with other people. Of course I could do it and be responsible about it, but I wouldn't feel good about that or comfortable showing off to the world that I was disregarding the city's orders for my own gain.

Anyway, to keep it brief, I dropped into apathy and le depreci3n for many weeks and I couldn't get my feet off the ground with any ideas. I did come up with my idea rather quickly, which was a shelter-in-place mocumentary exaggerating the events of what was going on— originally diving into abstract film at the end but I ended up cutting that. It was probably all inspired by my obsession with *The Lighthouse*. Either way I was caught up on trying to make it a satisfying narrative or making it seem original or creative. I couldn't settle for just making something fun, even if it was kind of dumb. After about a month had passed of this inaction, I finally got to work on it and I ended up really enjoying what I was doing, for the most part. The mocumentary section was saved for last because I dreaded doing it due to a bizarre insecurity of acting near my family. I ended up turning that into a challenge by throwing a curveball last minute and deciding to artificially overdub the entire film.

Like I said, this was admittedly all done very last minute. I know my mental health hasn't been amazing, but I can't always lean on that, because there were plenty of times it came down to being irresponsible. I know my work ethic was flawed, but I still can't fully blame myself. A project this big was supposed to be a very enjoyable experience, but it ended up becoming a stressful nightmare for me to think about and took a toll on my emotional state. But there was enjoyment to be had, and I did learn a significant amount about recording sound in post-production, as well as framing interesting shots. It's also difficult to try to get any dynamic shots when you're the actor and you don't want to make your family suffer through Steadicam boot camp. But for the situation I think it was actually a really good product, though the mocumentary parts ended up being the weak link to it all. The film really ends up focused around

one single scene I enjoyed shooting that feels more like a self-contained narrative, while the rest has a different style to it.

But hey, again, the most important takeaway during this project was that I had fun. I know I just thoroughly explained that I was miserable, but I really enjoyed having an excuse to do what I love one last time with this equipment— gratuitous B-roll, clean audio recordings, close-ups with depth, interesting angles, getting the lighting just right, and all that jazz. I struggle to do things I love if there's no purpose to it— I could go out and film some footage that looks amazing but I wouldn't feel good about it if I didn't have a greater reason to do it. And this was my greater reason to do it.

I don't know if I'll pursue any sort of a career in film, but I might keep it up as a hobby in the distant future. Though I do think I need some time to let my senior narrative and zenith projects fade out of recent memory before doing anything, and of course I would need a decent camera to do anything with. But I have learned a lot from all of my Freestyle film experience— one of those things being my strength in designing and envisioning shots. That is something I never would have guessed I might enjoy two years ago.