

“Ruin” FMP Evaluation

A couple of months before the Final Major Project was formally started, I had formed a group with 4 other people (Charlie Clark, Harrison Hewitt, Alex Payne, and Daniel Hyde) and planned to create a 30-minute-long mockumentary for a wrestling match that shaped a generation. I was set to be the director, Harrison was our creative production manager, Charlie was our producer, Alex was our DOP (director of photography), and Daniel was our editor. Our roles wouldn't end up changing as the project was altered. A script was written by Harrison, we then checked through it and I altered it in places to improve flow and grammar before we started casting and looking into props/outfits. We got to a point where we were set to book a wrestling ring to be assembled within the college for 1 day of filming, but we sadly ran into difficulties regarding how to fit this booking into the college's health and safety rules. As the FMP officially commenced, we were given our prompt of “futures” and a time limit that would render our initial plans impossible. With our wrestling project recorded to last around 35 minutes, which is well above the generally expected timeframes. All this combined within about a week ended up telling us that this initial idea was not going to work out. All this to say, we started this project off a little disheartened. Overall, we learned a valuable lesson about getting carried away and working within our limitations – next time vowing to include more people who are involved in the safety of the college and the setting of project limitations during the early inception of more difficult concepts. I also believe that I should trust my gut instincts when I believe certain elements aren't going to be as plausible as others and start working sooner on alternatives.

To add to our feelings of disappointment, we were also given a maximum group size of 4. This meant we had to remove our editor (Daniel Hyde) since we all had to edit our own cuts from almost scratch.

From the prompt of “futures”, we all set out to think up a new idea to get us back on track. Harrison had the idea to go post-apocalyptic, with a lead character walking through abandoned settings and reminiscing about how things were. I thought about adding more narrative elements in order to create a more dramatic and engaging story for our lead that would also be more easily marketed towards our intended audience. I thought up an antagonistic force to be movement-sensitive creatures, and we all set out to give them specific limitations and characteristics to make them a more terrifying yet believable threat. This would include me coming up with the idea that these beings hibernate until being woken by a loud noise, in order to allow our characters to travel and converse more safely (especially when considering how large the element of travel was set to be, I wanted to avoid having our audience believe that there were major issues with the continuity and logic of the creatures' habits). I also decided that it would work better if we gave the audience a sense of progression for our lead as he moves through the video. This included workshopping simple ideas, such as our lead gaining something and losing something throughout the video's runtime, adding a secondary protagonist and having them act as a foil (an opposite in regard to actions/behaviors/etc.) to our lead, and generating a story with more of a concrete beginning, middle and end. I found that including these elements made my previous projects more engaging for the people I showed them to and so thought to include it in this new FMP idea.

After we all agreed to adding these changes, I immediately set out to work on how I'd like this to look visually. This included creating a mood board, setting out a basic storyboard and starting to script out

the events with a simple synopsis. I thought that our lead needs a strong motivation to travel in order to more naturally introduce these narrative elements. We had already taken on the official prompt, futures, in a literal sense by setting our project in a literal post-apocalyptic future – but we wanted to add some secondary themes of our own. I thought up the idea of having our lead search for survivor gathering places as this also played nicely into the theme we wanted to focus on the most after the official prompt, hope. We chose this secondary theme as it ties nicely back into futures. For me, hope is for a future – for something good to happen, even if it won't.

Upon thinking about logical ways for survivor gatherings to be known by our lead, I came up with the idea of using radio broadcasts. We then connected the presence of a walkie talkie on our lead with the creatures and decided to have them generate static when they're near our lead. Not only does this provide more plausibility for our lead's survival thus far, but also provides a unique element to the creatures that gives them a weakness for the audience to latch onto. When a threat is given a weakness, the audience is given hope against it – most people wish for a happy ending – and this ends up adding more to our secondary theme of hope. As this is our first time working toward a particular theme, we're collectively hoping that our efforts to develop a secondary theme that works in tandem with the primary works out for the project. I personally, alongside the people I have shown this project to so far, find that we managed to capture the theme of hope effectively – though I will likely update this when I show the finished product to more people. I think the narrative elements we've included bolster this theme the most (as told to us by the people we've ran through the script with), leaving the end effectiveness to whether we've been able to capture this script as well as the general quality our editing and filming.

Upon finalizing our mood board, synopsis, and general shot list, we set out to formally start our script. I wrote out a basic outline of our script, adding a scene where our lead encounters one of the creatures early on to establish them as an effective threat (spurred on by the results of my research into similar creature-horror movies as well as what I've learned from the Microsoft Forms results we gained from people at the college – which are analyzed in detail in my academic report). I then also wanted the creatures to take the life of a person during the video in order to cement the danger and not give the idea that all encounters are easily escapable. Harrison came up with the idea to have a more comedic scene in order to add some more character to our two leads and allow the audience to better connect with them in the short time we had before the ending, and so I worked with him to think up a scene before I wrote down a test version of it that everyone was satisfied with. Everyone was pretty happy with what I had made for the script, so we moved on to the pre-production side of things and aimed to get ahead of schedule again.

For this project, we set out to push ourselves regarding locations. We wanted to do more research and travel to more places for visual variety. This was a difficult task for us, considering our post-apocalyptic needs, which meant that we had to be thorough in our research for safety and matching our desires for visuals. We set out to find locations online and as names came up for places that could match our desires, we set out to find second, third, and fourth opinions on each location. We scoured through forums and checked videos as well as the dates that all of these were released on to ensure that our information was accurate. Upon finding locations that looked the part, safety and legality were the next things we had to ensure before we could film there comfortably. Luckily, legal matters were resolved rather quickly by utilizing the comments people have given on each location and me performing my own research on laws and ownership for specific parts of the land. Safety was the bigger concern for me, ensuring that no personnel or equipment were put in a position of danger was paramount for a

productive filming session. After we felt comfortable enough with the videos, photos, and comments from multiple sources – we set out in my car to take a look ourselves and see how well each location fitted our needs and safety requirements. After looking at multiple locations, some that were perfect and others that were not quite what we were looking for, we settled on a collection of places and I started to work our script around each one. After this project, I believe I have a better idea than ever of effective ways to ensure that we find filming locations that match all of our needs from a visual standpoint to a safety and legal one. Moving forward, I can use the knowledge I've gained in this project to speed up this part of the process in future works.

At this point we were getting ready to pitch our project to the class and to our tutor in order to gain official approval for our project and feedback on our ideas. I set out a list of required topics that must be included within or as their own slide. Harrison and Alex were in charge of the general design for the slides and organizing the order for what we'll be presenting in the class. I wrote and phrased separate pieces of information such as our synopsis and other pieces of information on subjects such as our prompt, characters, problem solving, etc. for them to organize.

I then set out to organize a more specific schedule for what needed to be done and by what dates. I made some minor mistakes regarding when the Easter break comes in and then used the MK College website to check for term dates and make sure that our plan was accurate. I then set out to make a personal schedule as requested by the tutor. I planned out what equipment/software I'd need for any given week and set out to represent my own personal plans for the project so that I can more easily prioritize workloads and motivate my team in their specific areas. I find that having a personal schedule was surprisingly helpful in allowing me to organize my priorities and so will likely continue to use this concept in future projects going forward. I also plan to double-check my future schedules to prevent making the mistake I made this time, with regards to the dates for the Easter break and when we recommence college timetables.

The next step in preparing our pitch was for us to create some short videos to add to the world and represent some of the atmosphere and themes that we'd be aiming for in the final product. We had the idea to do this after hearing that another group had done this before, as well as how it can't possibly take away from the presentation – only add to it. Quite honestly, I hadn't thought of this as a possibility until we were told about this other group. We headed over to the college studio one afternoon and wrote + recorded 2 scenes for the pitch. 1 was a news broadcast from the start of the story's turn into its apocalyptic setting, and the other was a short video of a survivor warning people on the specifics of the creatures we wished to implement into the final product. I performed all of the editing and effects for both videos, teaching myself with videos, websites and nearby peers on how to use greenscreen for the first time and creating specific visual effects such as heavy static, a news bulletin, etc. I also took the lead in writing the dialogue for both videos, while using the other group members' opinions to maximise quality in the short time we had. We then placed the videos in specific places on our pitch presentation for them to make sense with the information being provided around them, whilst also providing a sense of progression between the two and for the pitch as a whole. Reception to the 2 videos was mostly positive, increasing audience enjoyment/engagement of the pitch but also received some light criticism regarding the dialogue and awkward performance in places. I plan to rectify this in future works by planning this aspect further in advance and working on those elements for longer.

For the finalizing aspects of our pitch, we wished to attempt to represent different ways we could represent our creatures and some of the shots we had planned. For this, I set out to try using AI-generated artwork that would be able to match our specific shots whilst saving time spent searching for an existing image that works “well enough” instead. It took some time to learn the limitations and complexities of how a computer interprets each prompt but overall, saved time in creating a mood board that related more personally to our specific needs. Alex took on the task of creating the slides that could give potential visual representations of our creatures to the audience. I suggested using AI as I had done and helped get him started. Our tutor on the day also helped out with tips and assistance in generating our images and we ended the session with satisfactory results and further knowledge in the differences between different AI art applications and further understanding on prompt specifics. I plan to continue using AI moving forward for any highly specific shot concepts and unique ideas – likely continuing to learn from every time I use it. We ran into major difficulties in trying to get any AI service to generate text, when we thought to try using it for generating a title/poster. We ended up scrapping this idea as it was consuming large amounts of time and producing minimal progress between attempts. Moving forward, I might look into using AI to generate a background for the text and then adding it myself – as well as other possible applications of mixing AI generations with my own work.

Finally, the day for the pitch commenced. Thankfully, all went well in presenting our project to the class. We received a large number of positive comments on the content and delivery of our pitch/concept. Many students even went so far as to say that we were their favorite presentation which meant a lot and majorly boosted our confidence in our concept and our delivery skills. We did receive some small comments regarding our delivery in places, which we intend to learn from and use to alter our future approach so as to engage more effectively with as much of our intended audience as possible.

Upon receiving official approval from the tutor, we then polished our pre-production with renewed confidence. We all wrote project approval papers for the project and commenced plans to start filming as soon as possible and remain as ahead of schedule.

Harrison, Alex, and I started to work on what props would be needed to best create what we had envisioned and scripted. This ended up being a multiple-day-long project, as this was our first time needing to concern ourselves with multiple props and several filming days requiring different items. The first step was to see what we needed and list it, whilst trying to get the number of items as low as possible to make filming simpler and require less items to be carried around at a time. To aid in this, we wanted to see what we already had at our disposal that either matched or could be used as a replacement for the items mentioned in our script. To keep things simple, whoever owned the prop was given the responsibility of bringing it in on the day that it was required. Naturally, there were a few items that we didn’t have available. For props, we scoured different online retailers and settled on ordering items using Amazon and its thankfully quick and often next-day delivery. We searched for items that matched our visual needs, weren’t too expensive, and would arrive within the next few days in time for filming. We split the cost and moved on to organizing costumes. For realism we wanted to have the outfits look worn and damaged, which led to us having the idea of searching through charity shops for older outfits that would better suit the story being told. After securing the clothes, Alex decided to try his hand at weathering them further and ended up doing a really impressive job. I also tried my hand at some weathering regarding a bottle that was used on our first day of filming. This was partly to remove the logo as we’re not legally allowed to show it, as well as to make it blend into the scene more effectively and look like it belongs in the scene. Alex and I both watched some videos online detailing

different weathering techniques and aspects to focus on for enhanced results for this micro-project. Moving forward, I'd like to consider what props we have and what we need earlier in order to increase our options for ordering props. I also believe that we can save time with this moving forward as we know now what to look for and focus on to ensure each item matches our needs.

The equipment we ended up using was carefully chosen to achieve specific results. We used Lapel body mics alongside a microphone attached to a boom pole to ensure we recorded our dialogue to a good quality, whilst also providing a range of options for what we use in the editing process. The Lapel mics were instrumental in allowing us to record audible dialogue in scenes that included more movement. We also used the boom pole for recording background sounds and general ambience that would go over many scenes as foley. We wanted to use a C100 camera with an aperture lens for replicating some new techniques that were recently taught to us in a workshop session relating to focus (and how we can alter it by changing the ISO and aperture to dramatic opposites). This was our first-time recording foley on-site and using these new techniques, so we managed to learn a lot about saving time and achieving better results after having some complications regarding audio and video quality. This included not properly setting up the peaking settings on our microphone which led to distorted audio in some takes, as well as some shots with some unexpectedly heavy grain effects or awkward brightness. Sadly, we also ran into battery issues with the Lapel mics during the last 2 days of filming and so had to rely on post-production foley for our more movement-filled scenes. This meant booking out an empty room with good acoustics that would match the original scenes as closely as possible, and recording a few takes of the lines that we were unable to record on the day. We did several takes in order to provide more choice for what sounds best in the editing process, as well as allowing me to splice several takes together and mess with their timings in order to make the scene sound and look as good as possible. We've learned a lot about the equipment batteries, sound recording, and these more complex techniques and I look forward to seeing how we can improve the implementation of these elements in future projects.

At this point, we finally got to start filming. We had to be conscious of whenever we were in a public space, and made sure that we'd be checking around to ensure that there were no bystanders in the background who could end up in a shot or misunderstanding our filming for a real situation. We calmly explained what was happening to several bystanders who lingered around the area (all of whom were very understanding and interested) and waited to let people walk past whenever they were travelling through. I'd learned through experience gained when filming my music video this year in other public places that these aspects are incredibly important. In a future project, I would like to try communicating for location permissions. Part of my concerns for bystander misunderstanding came from my own research of things like that occurring several times before, including people misunderstanding fight scenes in other small-scale productions. Due to the use of props in our scenes, I thought it would be even more important to prioritize our care in this area and so briefed the group on our plans before putting them into action. Thankfully, this led to a perfectly smooth filming day and even ended up providing some interesting conversations with some of the locals. I may look into conversing more with strangers during the multiple stages of my future projects to gain their unique and varied opinions, as my confidence in this area has been boosted by this experience.

Due to complications that are explained in the problem-solving section further below, we had a change in the actors. These issues fully materialized on the days of filming which led to some complications when filming scenes where there was heavy dialogue. Due to the extremely low amount of time they

had to learn their lines, we had issues with the actors ad-libbing. This made editing these scenes extremely difficult and is something that must be fixed by the next project. I plan to organize actors and their schedules as soon as possible and have the script sent over to them early so as to ensure consistency between takes and make the editing process much smoother.

Editing is the process I've put the most physical time into by a long shot. Where I would spend large amounts of time enjoying research, watching videos, writing down ideas and concepts, etc. during the earlier parts of this FMP, editing has been the most grueling of the bunch. I've had to force myself to take regular breaks and have spent many hours working on and tweaking specific scenes and clips. I learnt to force myself to rest after I had to edit the entirety of a 20-minute-long short film for the drama class of the college in only 2 days (due to complications regarding the original plan of having a cut produced by our original editor), and all the mental and physical challenges that caused. This time, I ensured that I started earlier and worked on finding a balance on working and resting. I don't think I've yet found this perfect balance, but I will strive to continue searching for it in all of my future projects.

For the music of the project, Charlie got into contact with a smaller scale youtuber who makes their own music that also happens to tie nicely into the tone of what we were making. He checked and found that they owned the rights to all the music on their channel and so decided to ask if they would be happy for us to use some of it. They were very accepting of us using their songs, so long as we credited them and don't use them for commercial purposes. This is definitely an avenue I wish to explore in future projects, as the further you stray from general, royalty-free music – the more genuine and impactful your project sounds.

For my edit, I once again decided to edit in my own little match-cuts. I did this by finding common instances in movement, from either the camera or character, and cut between them during the frame where they match. This is a technique I plan to continue using and gain more skill at using so as to make these cuts feel like even more planned and intentional cuts, rather than an editing choice. I also lent my assistance to Charlie in replicating some of these effects in his own personal edit, alongside helping him with lip-syncing. Examples include matching the movements of our lead as he travels out of frame and into another during the opening shots. I would also alter the speed of certain shots by small increments to have them flow better between each shot.

Due to the Lapel mics running out of power and us having to rely on using a separate mic, lip-syncing had become a large part of our editing process. Luckily enough, I had a large amount of practice in this area due to my editing of the August: Osage County scene for the drama students. Since we had several camera angles and 3 or so takes of the audio for the entire sequence, cuts between video/audio had to be timed to the lip movements accurately or it would risk standing out. Admittedly, I have an odd fascination with mouth movements while people speak, which may give me a slight advantage in this area. I'm aware that there can always be more I can learn and will continue to face every challenge in areas such as this head-on. Regarding battery difficulties, I plan to implement a more formal tick sheet of items that we need/should bring to any filming day. This should prevent us from forgetting to bring in extra batteries as well as hopefully prompting us to ensure that everything is fully charged before we head out. There are a lot of elements that need to be considered at all times and I find that, thus far, logging these elements and then working through them may appear tedious to some, but is actually instrumental in improving the ease of production.

I've also managed to improve my abilities relating to masks and masking. For scenes including a blur effect, I'd mask over specific parts of the background in order to prevent the effect from leaking onto parts of the environment that would ruin the sense of distance/scale/etc. This would include areas such as doorframes. I also (thanks to it being pointed out by a tutor) tried my hand at masking over a particularly obvious Lapel mic near the center of one of the shots. It has a little bit of a blur that leaks into the surrounding areas around it but if I have future opportunities, I plan to try out being more precise regarding the mask boundaries and my keyframes.

I finally got a chance to spend more time experimenting with color grading in this project and managed to learn a few things regarding the specifics of using different sliders, effects and settings. I still have a lot to learn in this area, though my interest has been piqued due to the large effect it has on continuity between scenes and general image quality. I also tried my hand at adding subtle coloration to the overall video and changed up my color corrections between each day's related shots – to provide some visual variation. I chose to use the colour green as my subtle choice, due to its meaning in relation to color theory – with the more positive meanings being used ironically and the general focus on the nature of this less-industrialized world. This section of the editing process is an area which I will need to put a lot more practice and research into moving forward.

Overall, for the entirety of the project, I have mixed feelings about it. There are aspects I am much fonder of than others, though I would also say that by making this our most ambitious project yet and pushing myself in so many ways – I've learned so much more during this project at once than in any other. I wouldn't have been prepared for this challenge without having completed the projects that preceded it, allowing this FMP to feel like a true combination of all the fun and learning I've experienced over my year at the college. I've loved this course, and I look forward heavily to being able to test the knowledge I've gained and learn new things in my future works. After showing this finished video to a few different people, I've been met with several positive remarks – which has improved my faith and general opinions on the project. I was always keep learning, however, and strive to make something truly special.

Problem solving (copy from academic report):

Pre-emptive:

“LOCATIONS WILL BE OUR GREATEST DIFFICULTY. WE ARE CURRENTLY LOOKING INTO ENSURING THAT WE CHECK ANY POSSIBLE LOCATIONS THROUGH MULTIPLE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE SAFE AND LEGAL TO FILM IN.

OUR SECOND GREATEST DIFFICULTY WILL BE TO PORTRAY THESE CREATURES AND FRAME THEM IN A TERRIFYING LIGHT WHILST NOT ACTUALLY GIVING THEM PHYSICAL FORM. WE WILL BE DOING CAMERA TESTS AND SEARCHING THROUGH SIMILAR EXAMPLES ON HOW WE CAN FRAME THE SCENES TO SUBTLY TELL THE AUDIENCE WHEN SOMETHING IS THERE. UTILIZING UNNATURAL EMPTY SPACE AND BREAKING THE CONVENTIONS OF CAMERAWORK TO CREATE A FEELING OF UNEASE AND USING OBJECTS LIKE STRING TO INTERACT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT WHILST NOT HAVING SOMETHING EXISTING IN THE SCENE.

WE WILL ALSO BE UTILIZING CHARACTER EXPRESSION AND ACTING TO INDICATE WHEN THE AUDIENCE SHOULD FEEL THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG. USING EFFECTS SUCH AS A FAINT HEARTBEAT WILL HELP IN ALLOWING PEOPLE TO EMPATHIZE WITH OUR CHARACTERS' SUDDEN STRESS WHEN DEALING WITH ONE OF THE CREATURES."

Upon getting closer to the planned days for filming, we have become aware of a few more potential issues:

We have discussed how much movement is planned for our indoor scenes that will be requiring artificial lighting and decided that bringing batteries would be our best option for time efficiency.

Despite our plans to use Lapel body mics, there are scenes with dialogue that include more movement. This will likely add rustling of clothes to our audio and require us to record our dialogue over again and add it in post as foley. We aim to ask to keep the microphone from our planned equipment for a longer period of time in order to record dialogue over and provide options for adding it in post. We are considering bringing a boom pole with the microphone to see if we can avoid needing to record all dialogue with movement over again as well.

Due to the distance we will be travelling to our locations for filming, we will also be bringing an extra battery for the camera and backup batteries for the Tascam. I also plan to bring a portable battery pack and phone charging cable to keep my options for maps and calling for assistance always available. I will be dropping a location recording pin for my family and nearby friends and keeping people updated on what's happening to ensure that people know I'm safe or if I require any form of help.

It has also come to our attention that there is a large amount of noise produced when walking around our chosen locations. Due to the lack of visual evidence to this noise found on camera, we intend to use foley sound whenever our characters travel. This is to preserve audio quality, especially when dialogue is involved, and to lower the volume of travelling sounds due to the noise-sensitive creatures our characters are supposed to be avoiding. Foley sound will be gathered from a mixture of online sources and our own personal recordings in order to best meet the requirements of each particular scene.

Filming days issues:

Upon starting to film our project, a new set of issues appeared for us to solve. Sadly, after finishing up our first day of filming, my car (our primary mode of transportation) broke down for about 2 weeks of our time. This ended up costing us our plans to film over the 2 weeks of Easter break as we hurried to find solutions to our travel problems and get my car looked at by a mechanic. Upon the break coming to a close, we had to accept that we would need alternative transport. Luckily, we had time to research our options which sped up the final few

filming days and allowed us to remain on schedule. We opted to use buses and taxis to get us to our required locations and changed our choice depending on cost and proximity to specific filming location. We split the cost for taxis and grabbed food on the way – typically in advance so as to ensure that we can eat lunch even during a long filming day. We also opted to walk to one location as we determined that the cost of a taxi was extortionate and there were no buses that could bring us close enough.

During the final day of filming, we ran into an issue where all the Lapel body mics were left without charge, which meant we had to rely on using a boom pole, Tascam, and microphone. Unfortunately, we ran out of power towards the end of that day's filming due to our constant use of it for some very dialogue-heavy scenes. Thankfully, we had some practice with dubbing for this project as we had attempted to create and record monster noises a matter of days prior. We decided to dub over the last remaining lines as the camerawork worked nicely for hiding specific mouth movements and due to the difficulty of getting back to this specific location being a little out of reach for such a small amount of dialogue. We asked about a room with minimal echo/distortion in order to best replicate the conditions of the original scene.

During 2 of our 4 filming days, we had to deal with filming in more public locations. This led to multiple issues such as finding people in the background of certain scenes. Since we were aware of this beforehand, we viewed our scenes on the day immediately after recording them with particular focus on the background to limit the amount of editing required to remove these background problems. We found that reshooting a specific shot is a lot easier for us than to attempt to mask over the background for the scene.

During our final few days of filming back-to-back, we were presented with issues regarding our main actor's availability due to their work and other responsibilities. Due to us having less time than desired for these remaining scenes, we decided to add another planned day of filming in order to guarantee us being able to record all our required shots and remain within the recommended level of progress for that given week of the FMP.

The last problem we ran into was a minor one, where our second actor was unavailable for the days that were needed for us to remain on schedule. Due to the smaller nature of the 2 parts they were set to play, we decided to give the role of our secondary lead to our producer, Charlie, and have myself perform the extremely short role of a bandit. Luckily, Charlie was one of the chosen actors that I aimed to use due to how much of a direct opposite he is to our main lead – so I consider this a blessing in disguise.