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by

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2013

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**UNCANNY VALLEY**

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**UNCANNY VALLEY**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **UNCANNY VALLEY**

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The following report describes the pre-production, production, and post-production stages of the short film *UNCANNY VALLEY*, a film about a person trying to digitally resurrect his deceased mother. After his mother passes away from cancer, Anish finds a place where he can input data in order to breathe life into expired things. *UNCANNY VALLEY* touches on the subject of the proliferation of personal data and how it might be used to reconstruct an incomplete portrait of a given period of time. This report recounts the experience of producing the film as well as insights into the writing process and the pre-production process. Supplemental materials include a final draft of the script and storyboards.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pumped full of butt-rock and caffeine I began to write my thesis<sup>1</sup>. If you are not familiar with the sub-genre of butt-rock, it is a derogatory term used to describe the likes of Creed, Hinder, Nickelback, Saliva, Theory of a Deadman, etc. that frequented the Peoria airwaves disguised as “modern rock-alternative” in my youth. An apt term if you ask me. At this point in my life I listened to butt-rock ironically. I laughed as I sang along. But that’s a dangerous game to play because after a while I found that I no longer listened to it ironically. I accidentally started to enjoy it again. I suppose that is the peril of irony.

For a majority of the writing process I was huddled in the UA9 building. More specifically I was huddled in the grad lounge. The grad lounge consisted of two rooms. The back room was designed as a lounge area fully equipped with a television and couch. The other room an open office area where around seven computers rested along with one additional area that was partitioned and isolated from the rest of the office via a faux wall. Since hardly anyone was in the grad lounge during off hours I practically had an office to myself. When someone was there I brought in the white board in front of the entrance to function as a sliding door to remain isolated.

Those were lonely nights. But it’s hard for me to write any other way. I tried working with Catherine Licata at a coffee shop. I tended to socialize more than work. I also tend to get self conscious when writing in a public place. It was also a nice retreat from our hot house during the summer months. The house lacked central air. The poor window units were no match for the oppressive heat. Being isolated also allowed me certain freedoms that would otherwise raise eyebrows. I gesticulated wildly to mimic

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<sup>1</sup> This is how I began my thesis report, too.

actions that I thought might go into the script. I spouted onomatopoeias like someone with Tourette syndrome. I got up and walked around aimlessly if frustrated or stuck. And of course I could blast butt-rock without being judged.

I also had a misfortune that involved a woman during this time.

So butt-rock, isolation, and heartbreak all contributed to what my thesis ultimately became. In that way my thesis is personal. But the real inspiration for my thesis came via a short documentary, MIJO, by Chithra Jeyaram, a former grad student. The documentary is about a mother's relationship to her only son as she battles cancer. In the documentary, the son, who is no older than six, describes what death is. Even though he physically describes death, it is obvious that he doesn't fully understand the consequences of death because again, he's only six. Throughout the documentary he does what six year olds do and frequently interrupts and annoys his tired mother who between taking care of her son and teaching dance also goes in for treatment.

Thankfully she is doing well. But I thought about what it might be like if she passed while he was still young. If the son might feel regret or even guilt as he got older even though he shouldn't because most 6-year-olds don't have the mental capacity to fully comprehend the permanence of death. If he felt time was wasted in her last days. These thoughts led me to what my thesis ultimately became.

My opening statement was a white lie. I had a draft written before my caffeine and butt-rock induced writing frenzy began. It was based on another idea entirely. Below is a process paper I wrote sometime in March 2012 about the original idea. I've included it because I borrowed many elements from the original idea and incorporated them into the final project.

*About a year or so ago, I had received a Facebook message from a friend who I hadn't spoken to in a couple of years. I knew him since grade school and had considered him a close friend all the way until I had left for college. At that point, he didn't have the grades to go to college and didn't want to attend a community college in Peoria, Illinois. He had family in Arizona and decided to attend one out there to escape the clutches of Peoria. At this point I started to lose contact with him as I went off to college in Illinois. Ultimately he dropped out and came back to Peoria, working odd and end jobs until he made the decision to go into the Air Force.*

*Stationed in Italy, he was checking in to see how I was doing. I replied, which started a chain of back and forth messages via Facebook. I finally suggested that instead of trading succinct messages back and forth we should make attempt at verbal communication. Thanks to Skype that wasn't too big of a problem.*

*Talking face to face, we found that our conversation was almost as succinct and sparse as those Facebook messages. The only time the conversation would pick up was when we would reminisce over stories we had told each other a thousand times before, but we both found that we had nothing new to say to each other. Our point of references had changed. Our interests had changed. I thought re-connecting with an old friend would come easy and that we would fall back into a routine, but it took a lot more effort than I thought it would to keep a conversation going. Ultimately, the conversation ended with both of us promising to visit one another, which of course never happened.*

*But that got me thinking about the transient nature of some friendships. I started to recount who I used to be friends with and was surprised at some of the people I was at*

*one time associated with. I started asking myself why I was a friend with some of these people and had no other answer than "They were on the same team or in the same class." And removed from that context, it would be unlikely that we would've ever hung out and even less likely that we'll ever reconnect with one another now. Basically a friendship with no foundation. Complacency with the alternative being loneliness.*

*Then you go to college and suddenly the world, at least for me, started to seem like a much bigger place, especially since the University of Illinois was a fairly large institution. And suddenly with 30K students, complacency wasn't an issue anymore. But I wasn't overcome with nostalgia when I returned home from college during my freshman and sophomore years. It was quite the opposite. I didn't hold Peoria in high regard and I felt like I was better than my hometown and was a bit of an elitist punk upon my return. And I remember going out when I was home and dreading running into people I was friends with high school because of the awkward, obligatory conversation that resulted in nothing more than an exchange of pleasantries and a realization that your relationship to one another has changed because of a new set of circumstances, one in which not being close friends doesn't result in the same consequence of loneliness.*

*That's where the idea for this script came from. So I imagined the one line synopsis being "A dissolution of a friendship".*

*Ike (I really need to change those names) who might be 19 or 20 has returned home on some sort of small break with this realization and as a result doesn't bother to contact Mike. However, Mike is still under the impression that the relationship is as it used to be. But since you don't "break up" with a friend in the same way that you do a*

*girlfriend or boyfriend, the film would ideally deal with how Mike comes to the same realization as Ike when he unexpectedly comes to visit him.*

*The idea of them hunting came from another past experience. I was a teenager visiting a friend in another town, Decatur, IL. You might remember it from the movie *The Informant!*. We were at one of his friends place and he was showing us his new BB gun. We went out to a nearby field and all took turns firing the gun at nothing in particular. At a certain point though, we all wanted a target to shoot at. This was unfortunate for this rabbit that was stationed nearby. I don't remember how, but I was given the gun first. So I pumped the hell out of the gun with some difficulty as the rabbit wasn't too far away, but I wanted to make sure that there was enough force to pierce the rabbit. I lifted it up, looked down the barrel of the gun and lined up the sights with the rabbit. I had never killed anything larger than a cockroach before and as it lingered in that spot, I started to have second thoughts. So I waited a few seconds before firing hoping it would hop away. It still didn't move. It just stood there. It wasn't even eating anything at this point. It was just there. I knew it was a matter of time before my other friends were going to start saying something so I decided I just better fire. So I did. But not before slightly recalibrating so that I would miss left. The rabbit's ears perked up, but it remained stationary.*

*The gun was passed on to my left. And though I was ridiculed for missing, I was relieved that I wouldn't be the one to kill that thing, unless we all missed and it came back to me again. Again, I was just hoping the damn thing would run away by that point. My friend went through the same process, pumping the gun, lifting it, and taking aim. As*

*soon as the gun was steady he fired without hesitation. And it hit. The rabbit plopped over on its side and started convulsing uncontrollably. It went into shock and lost control of its bowel movements. We were all stunned, intrigued and horrified, but not willing to admit it to one another. After it lay still, we all got up and ran.*

*Night came and while going over the events of the day that encounter dominated the conversation. I admitted my reluctance to shoot and emphasized my righteousness in my deliberate miss, which they didn't buy. I was a terrible shot to my friend who had actually killed the rabbit. To him, I was just as guilty because I didn't do anything to stop it from getting killed. And he was right. I thought about it and realized I did kind of wanted to see the rabbit get hit, but didn't want to be the one to hit it. This made me feel guilty. Either way my friend was still amiss by the event and it didn't help that we all continued to guilt trip each other a good while after it happened.*

*My friend woke me up early that morning. He looked at me with wild eyes and had only this to say; "We have to bury it. We have to go back and bury it." It was around 2 AM and it was clear that he hadn't fallen asleep. I refused to go since I was tired and felt as if it wasn't my mess to clean up. But my other friend did. This is how I imagine their journey back to the scene of the crime.*

*My friend had a shovel in his hand. The rabbit still lay lifeless on the ground as they started to dig a hole next to it. The ground, being tough caused them to take turns digging. They probably got tired and didn't dig a deep enough hole. I imagine them being kind of afraid to touch the carcass, so after an argument about who should pick up and put the rabbit in its grave it was probably scooped and tossed unceremoniously into the*

*hole. I would imagine my Catholic friend uttering a prayer while the other bowed his head out of reverence for the rabbit. They probably threw dirt over it and then realized halfway through that only part of the body would be covered. They most likely shrugged their shoulders and left albeit with a feeling of relief. Their consciences, and thus mine were cleared. And when we got back home I celebrated with them. We celebrated by playing the game Goldeneye. A game within the "FPS" genre, or first person shooter.*

*I was enamored by the idea of the rabbit serving as a metaphor for their friendship in the film. That Mike wants to save it while Ike wants to put it out of its misery actually speaks to how they currently view their friendship.*

*So the outline that I sent was kind of a regurgitation of these ideas on paper that I tried my best to arrange into some sort of order without removing any elements. Right now I think I'm trying to pack a lot in and am in the process of trying to determine what's essential and what's extraneous. Having looked at it for a while I'm pretty positive that I don't need the prologue and the point I was trying to drive home with that scene can be done in the following scenes.*

*I think the way that it's structured right now is pretty traditional. At least that's what I was aiming for. Although the ending seems ambiguous, I still think there's a proper climax and resolution that would make it traditional, which to me is the decision that Mike makes to kill and bury the rabbit.*

*The one thing that's obvious from reading the outline is the sci-fi element, which I added in for a variety of reasons. One of which was the motivation for the hunting sequence. Since they are supposed to be around 19-20, I figured this context would be*

*great since the first thing they shoot doesn't "die" in a traditional sense and the shock of the animal bleeding and convulsing in this world where they both thought things weren't supposed to die I thought was interesting. I also thought it would be a nice hook and a more entertaining way to frame the story. I was debating after some conversations with people about whether or not to utilize and emphasize the "video game world" more, but my instinct is to downplay it as much as possible and relegate it to the background so that it doesn't overshadow the story between the two friends. Right now it's used primarily as a way to move the plot forward, though there is one glaring thing and that is a reason for why Ike created it in the first place. I filled in all these little details without even thinking about the larger question of "Why?". I don't have an answer for this yet, and I think that's important before deciding to implement the sci-fi context to the short. I'm wondering if I can't justify a reason for it existing that is relevant to Mike and Ike's situation, should I bother setting it in that context?*

*The other thing is making both characters flawed, but not to the point where they're too unlikeable. Right now it seems like Mike is much more likeable while Ike just comes across as a condescending jerk in the outline. My hope is that in scenes such as the one where Ike changes the track they are initially both singing the song in earnest for a moment before Ike totally destroys the moment by starting to question the musical tastes of Mike. So that you can simultaneously see what the relationship was once like and how it's changed. Though I would be much obliged if there are any suggestions on how to do that more effectively.*

*I realize Act I is a bit long with what seems like a lot of exposition. I have a visual example of how that scene would be shot and cut. The purpose of that is to set up the world and start off the film with visual and story hook. And again, at this point that chip that Ike is after is almost a red herring as the film isn't really about that. But is that a bad thing?*

I stole the rabbit adventure and the sci-fi context from this draft and repurposed them to the current context<sup>2</sup>. The sci-fi context all of a sudden was very relevant in addition to being a hook and a more entertaining way to frame the story. Because now it served as a space where the character could reconstruct something he lost. So instead of a “dissolution of a friendship” the idea became the resurrection of a loved one. The rabbit would serve a different metaphorical purpose. In this context, it would serve as a reminder that there is no such thing as a utopia, which upon first glance appears that a place that was seemingly death-free (via the regeneration of the bird) where you could theoretically recreate anything would be.

The idea of reconstruction from fragments of data came from another process paper I wrote sometime in June of 2012.

*So there's a ton of information on the internet. The amount of data available for a given person is enormous when you take into account social networking and all the data that is collected through that. Now that digital cameras are easily accessible and people taking more pictures and videos than ever before it got me wondering if we can accurately reproduce any given moment from here on out or at the very least reconstruct a given moment with a very low margin of error. Other sources of data such as blogs,*

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<sup>2</sup> Of course the music they would be arguing over was butt-rock. It always comes back to butt-rock. Butt-rock seems to be the strange constant in all of this.

*Twitter, cookies and various other forms of data (credit card information that would give a hint to other habits such as food habits, what a person was buying as one example) combined with the latter would more or less give an accurate picture of who a person was at any given moment. In theory.*

*So this is kind of the framework for the idea. The idea is that a person who has lost someone close to him or her (or not) has created or repurposed an existing construct that he frequents in which all this data that the person culls is processed and interpreted to create a digital reconstruction of an environment, landscape, and eventually a person. But there are problems associated with trying to do this. Subtext, nuance, anything that's not explicitly written would be lost which in turn would make data hard to contextualize. Trying to recreate something physical has its share of problems, too. Especially when it comes to a human being. It would seem easier to reproduce something larger like the shifts in attitude of a nation rather than something very specific like a single human being.*

*Physically there would be a whole host of problems. Most people probably don't have enough video to capture the range of facial expressions that a person has. Same with photos, especially since most people in most photos have a standard smile. Also, there a good possibility that certain areas would never be captured (side/back of the head, someone's naked body, etc.). Audio would also be a huge problem. Especially with quality and fidelity of most recordings. Without clean samples you can't properly recreate a voice. Without enough samples things like cadence, inflection, etc. would be difficult to replicate. Basically, it would leave the computer to interpret the missing data.*

*And I imagine that a computer at this point would fuck it up, instead giving you a creepy, fucked up rendition of a person you once knew. I imagine it being in uncanny valley<sup>3</sup> territory. That is, the region of negative emotional response towards robots (or in this case the digital reconstruction) that seem "almost human".*

*So for example, if the person we were trying to recreate lacked video or photo of the back of their head, I imagine the computer trying to fill in the gaps but not doing it well enough so that when our digital recreation turns around, the back of the head starts to glitch (in a similar manner of like a Nintendo 64 game). Or if there aren't enough audio samples, parts of words would sound all fucked up because there is simply no data. Either that or the interpretation is just not good and leads to words or a cadence that doesn't quite match the rest of the sentence. Or transitions from one facial expression to another would look jump-cutty or again would glitch.*

*So then the dilemma becomes, do you pull the plug or are you that desperate to bring someone back that you forgive the inconsistent nature of the creation.*

*I imagine the short going through the following (this is in really broad strokes):*

*Preparing to go into the construct.<sup>4</sup>*

*Once in the construct reaching the place to where you input the data*

*Having insufficient data*

*Getting out of the construct to find any type of additional data you can.*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2011-07/19/uncanny-valley-tested>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncanny\\_valley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncanny_valley)

<sup>4</sup> [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_f4QLPUyg0yI/SxHaSg7A33I/AAAAAAAAACmI/xbS-15fdos8/s1600/IMG\\_2792.JPG](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_f4QLPUyg0yI/SxHaSg7A33I/AAAAAAAAACmI/xbS-15fdos8/s1600/IMG_2792.JPG)

Was thinking something like this except with something very subtle in the distance that would let you know you are in a simulated world (and without the power lines or road).

*Reentering the construct, but not realizing something else has come in with the character (a gerbil? Mouse? Pet rabbit? I don't know).*

*Having enough data this time, but now it needs to process, which takes some time.*

*In the down time, character "kills" something in the environment (a bird or something. And this bird should maybe not be a perfect recreation either.) But instead of dying in a traditional manner (didn't have the video or data for death) it just explodes into a flurry of pixels before imploding into a single point. But the next thing the character kills (gerbil, mouse, whatever), turns on its side, bleeds and convulses while shitting itself with our character obviously shocked and somewhat intrigued and horrified.*

*Returns to place where processing finishes up.*

*Recreation looks like person, but with obvious gaps and flaws.*

*So here's where the narrative could fork into two separate scenarios*

1.

*Destroys recreation or pulls the plug on recreation.*

*Buries thing it kills*

*Leaves, with implication of abandoning any future attempts at recreation.*

2.

*Settles for flawed recreation*

*Recreates thing it kills with obvious imperfections as well.*

*Originally was thinking you would have two people in it, but I suppose it can just be a solitary endeavor.*

A picture of the NASA developed space rover, Curiosity and Google Street View also inspired the sci-fi environment. Figure 1 depicts a composite self-portrait of Curiosity comprised of images that the machine took of itself. The most interesting thing about it was how fragmented it looked and how the different panels were of varying resolution

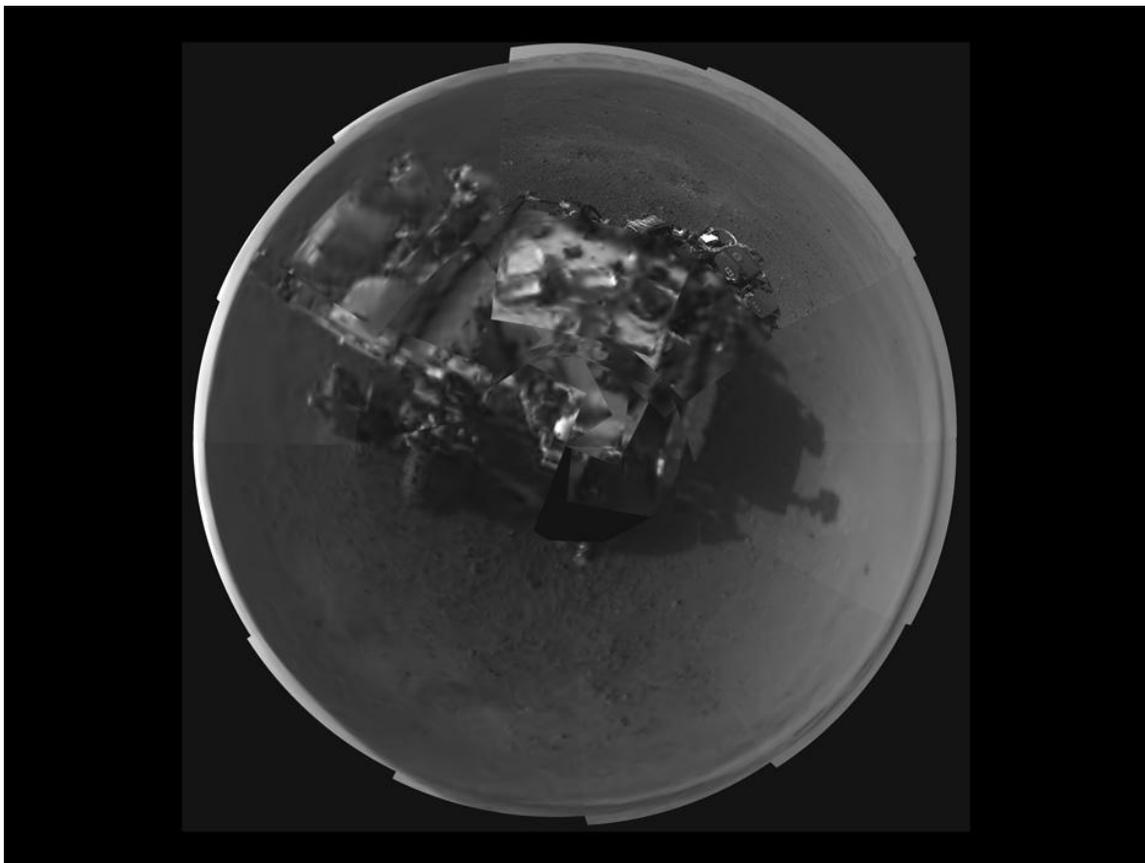


Figure 1: A “selfie” of Curiosity. Note the panels of varying resolution.

If you ever viewed Google Street View, which is a part of Google Maps that lets you view down to the street level instead of simply a bird’s-eye view that most maps

restrict you to. When viewing Street View, it appears as though photos of different parts of the same block could have been taken at different times. So a photo taken just down the street might have been taken during a cloudy day while further up the block, the photo was taken during a sunny day. Or maybe one was taken in the morning while the other in the evening. There existed a myriad of possibilities. With the idea of the Curiosity composite in mind, it made me think of what might happen if you stitched those together in the same way the Curiosity did its self-portrait. This is how I approached the environment as well as the look of the mother during the climax of the film.

The decision to make it the mother was an easy one. It couldn't be a girlfriend. Going to that length to bring back a girlfriend or to recreate someone that rejected you wouldn't have the same impact as if it was a mother. It would also be more of a farce since it would probably be much easier getting a new girlfriend that it would be to recreate one. Though that's hilariously tragic, too. However, you can't just find a new mother. I suppose it could've been the character trying to recreate his wife. But I had written the script for a specific actor, who was a 27-year-old. It seemed more tragic that at that age he still wrestled with decades old feelings of guilt and regret to the point where he would take on the monumental task of trying to digitally resurrect his mother.

Making it a solitary endeavor was another easy decision. I realized that the second character provided comic relief and explained things that could be explained visually and through sound design. Much more fun. And I wouldn't have to worry about dialogue.

So I've written almost fourteen pages about the genesis of the idea. I could've actually summed it up in one sentence. Basically I wanted an excuse to make an

entertaining, minimalist sci-fi movie with cool props. And the above fourteen pages justified that urge.

## PRE-PRODUCTION: CASTING

The script was originally written for the actor Jeff Chapman, who can be seen in figure 2. He resides in Libertyville, IL and isn't actually an actor. He spends his days as a caretaker for a greenhouse, but occasionally moonlights as an actor for me. Actually it's more like once in a blue moon. I worked with Jeff previously on a number of short works that included CLOWN, where his physical talents were on display in the dialogue-free film as a degenerate, wannabe hustler. I tailored my thesis to his physical strengths and kept the dialogue to a bare minimum.

He agreed to come down to Austin to shoot during the week of March 17. However, as the date neared I received the following message via Facebook.



Figure 2: Jeff Chapman.

*March 4, 2013*

*Sorry I didn't call you yesterday, it was hectic. Kush bit my roommate's puppy on the mouth and split her lip open, so we had to take her to the vet and keep a close eye on her for the rest of the day.*

*As I've been setting this trip up, I've realized that there are, as always, a few problems. Firstly, my parents need to use my CRV and the trailer to take the tractor in for it's scheduled service on the 20th, along with picking up the rototiller from a friend who is borrowing it so it will be hard to leave the state. I don't think my vehicle would be up for that kind of compound mileage anyway. It'll just be difficult to leave the state this month.*

*Second, I ordered about \$1000 worth of plants for the farm and they are scheduled to arrive between March 15- April 15, and must be planted in their permanent spots immediately upon arrival. Since I am the only one here who knows where and how to plant trees, vines, and berry bushes, I can realistically only be away for a week total without risking losing the plants. I'm worried that they may ship them earlier rather than later, since the forecast for next week indicates temperatures holding steady above freezing.*

*Also, as I had mentioned in my text, I'm quite penniless right now. I've put nearly all of my savings into the farm, and have less than one hundred dollars available until I start working at Sandhill again (as soon as the ground thaws).*

*On top of that, I have a greenhouse full of seedlings that require daily attention, and I'm admittedly nervous leaving them under someone else's care, considering how*

*much it would set me back if they died. I also just moved my entire aquarium system to a friend's house, and although he could call me with a problem, being here makes troubleshooting easier.*

*As you can see, I've got a bit more on my plate than I had anticipated, which makes it very difficult to get down to Austin, and reduces the time that I could spend down there. If you think we could get down there, shoot everything, and be back within a week, then I could probably still pull it off. Otherwise, it may be better to cast someone locally. I'm sure Austin has some great personalities to offer.*

*Again, I'm sorry I didn't foresee these problems before I agreed to come down, but nature dictates my schedule, and considering how much effort I have already invested, I can't risk missing the spring window this year.*

Due to unforeseen events, I had to find a new lead. On top of that, I would have to reschedule the shoot since Jeff was supposed to bring down my prop master, Samuel Copeland, who planned on finishing and bringing the props along the day Jeff was to drive down. To ship everything I needed via next day or two day shipping simply



Figure 3: Caleb Fisher before the accident working as a security guard.

would've cost too much and wasn't something I had budgeted for.

I had another actor in mind who I had worked with before. His name was Caleb Fisher and can be seen in figure 3. He played the explorer in, *THE EXPLORER*, a dialogue-free short film about an explorer. He is stranded after the rest of his party perishes during an expedition in the new world. However, as figure 4 depicts, he was involved in a tragic accident that disfigured him from the respectable man seen in figure 3 into his current predicament as seen in figure 5 which eliminated him from consideration.



Figure 4: A low-budget reenactment of the accident.

Fortunately I had worked with an actor named Chirag Patel from Houston on the set of my colleague Hammad Rizvi's thesis film, SUNNY SQUARE. I worked production sound and got to witness his performance over the span of a few days and thought he was talented enough to bring my script to life. I approached Chirag about the project shortly after Jeff dropped out. After reading the script he agreed to come aboard. I was in a bind and I had set up a number of casting calls in the event that he declined. If he hadn't come through, I would've had to postpone the shoot again as the people that responded for the lead role were far too young.

Jeff bowing out turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I always wanted to make a film, especially within the sci-fi genre, with a minority star and without making any reference to race or the difficulties of cultural assimilation. A lack of minority talent in Austin made it difficult. I've tried for multiple projects and haven't been successful. I was extremely fortunate to have known Chirag. To do this with Jeff would've required the use of brownface, which I'm sure would've been both hilariously confusing and terrifying while simultaneously undermining the other themes that run through the film.

I also feel as though a lot of films by second-generation children of immigrants tend to concentrate on those two issues. There have been films that have been successful in dealing with those specific issues so there was no need for me to retread that ground at this point. I may change my tune and tell that story sometime in the future, but I had no interest in doing so for my thesis.

The other benefit of having Chirag was his ability to handle dialogue. With Jeff, I knew and valued his physical abilities but risked the climax of the film to fall flat since I wasn't sure what I would be getting performance-wise once dialogue was introduced.



Figure 5: Deformed Caleb who now works as a dirty hipster.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION: LOCATIONS**

I started the search for locations around December. I designed the script to have two locations: a ranch and a bedroom. I was poor and without a producer at the time. I figured I would make it easy on myself. I tailored the script around a ranch because I knew of a ranch that one of my classmates, Tim Edwards, had access to in Giddings, TX. It was his grandfather's ranch. Tim kindly donated time on the ranch for the project. A majority of the script takes place there so it was nice to nail that location down early in the process.

The Edwards ranch was perfect. It contained large, open spaces along with patches of forest. Just what the script called for. Plus I shot a couple things there before so I was already familiar with the terrain. I tailored the script around a location I knew I likely had access to.

The decision to shoot in Giddings was a costly one. Because it was an hour east of Austin, it meant that everyone would have to stay in Giddings, especially if we wanted to get shots at the crack of dawn. Driving back and forth every day after a long day on set would be too exhausting.

The second location was trickier to find. It called for a kid's bedroom. Sounded easy to secure but ultimately proved difficult. Managed to find studio space on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the CMB building. It served as a family room/dining area for a feature length film Steve Mims shot early in the spring semester of 2013. I considered repurposing it into a bedroom. After a discussion with my DP, Huay-Bing Law, I convinced him that it

would sell as a kid's bedroom if I repaint the walls and furnish the place, we stopped the search for a bedroom and focused our efforts on decorating that studio space.

I hate white walls. They are boring. So I repainted the walls of the set a navy blue color. Another luxury afforded by shooting in a studio. I chose a darker color because it would soften shadows created by any light source.

Turned out that both locations were free, too. I originally had a budget of about \$2400, most of which was to be used for lodging and food. I didn't have any contingency money so I had to be extremely vigilant leading up to and during the shoot with how I managed my money. In fact, I imposed austerity measures on myself similar to those on Greece to keep me from unnecessarily spending any money that could otherwise go towards my thesis.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION: CREW**

I have trust issues. This is due to the nature of student shoots. You rarely find individuals who are as invested in the project as you are. So for better or worse a lot of people including myself wear multiple hats throughout the course of a project. Fortunately, I had a few people that were equally as invested in my thesis as I was.

I've known Samuel Copeland since my days as an undergrad at the University of Illinois. We made many shorts together and as a result are cut from the same cloth. I tasked him with designing and making all the props in the movie. He knew the script and without much else to go on he designed and created all the awesome props including the metal detector, the modified power glove, motherboard, manual that includes the map, and the animatronics that went into the fake dead rabbit he made. The props were all intentionally designed to look used and worn out to give it a more naturalistic appearance. And since the glove and metal detector were presumably made by the protagonist, it made perfect sense for it look very piece-meal. We didn't want anything slick or futuristic looking. That would've betrayed the naturalistic look of the film.

Huay-Bing Law was my director of photography. I had worked with him on a shoot where he served as the assistant camera. He was extremely disciplined and was much more knowledgeable about the craft of cinematography than myself. He could've easily taken the DP credit for that particular film as he provided a lot of valuable advice along the way. Getting personable people on board that were much more intelligent than myself about the specific craft was my goal and I lucked out when it came to finding Huay.

He was always skeptical about selling the set in the studio as the bedroom. My original production designer had dropped out, leaving me to prep the room myself. I repainted the walls a dark, blue color and got some furniture, but the room still seemed barren. Luckily, Haley Anderson came to the rescue and decorated the set on short notice. She brought it to life. The room looked lived in. The amazing thing is that she was working on her own thesis with a deadline fast approaching and still took the time and effort to do a fantastic job with my set. She brought in a bunch of her own furniture and props to decorate the room. Before then, the room was barren and would've been a tough sell.

## PRODUCTION

I drive a silver minivan. Embarrassing, sure, but a great tool to have in film school. It hauled equipment on many shoots. It even managed to make the grueling trip to New Mexico with equipment stacked to the ceiling with a sagging behind due to the uneven distribution of weight. All I wanted out of the vehicle at this point was for it to make one last haul and then it could rest in peace as it had saved me a lot of money over the years, but was worse for wear as a result. We didn't take out that much equipment since everything in Giddings was going to be using natural light. But there was a prop door that simply wouldn't fit in the van. I had to find a U-Haul at the last minute on the day of the checkout, unload the van then load the U-Haul before I could drive to Giddings.

This presented a problem. Since the van also doubled as the picture van it had to make it up to Giddings. Luckily for me I had two crewmembers that were both scheduled to work only the first couple days of the shoot. This meant that one could drive the van up to Giddings and ride with the other person on the way back to Austin. Crisis averted. However since everyone else drove to Giddings, it also meant that no one would be able to drive it back to Austin the following Thursday. I had more immediate things to deal with so I left that problem for later.

It ended up taking me much longer to arrive in Giddings. The rest of our crew also arrived fairly late and it was decided that instead of forcing everyone to wake up before the sun came up that we reschedule and post-pone our start time to let everyone get an adequate amount of rest. We would try and get those shots that we scheduled in the morning that evening instead.

## Day One

We started with the metal detector scene. Shot it just like it was boarded. It went smoothly.

Next we tackled the series of shots that involved the mini-van. I had to use my mini-van instead of a Ford Aerostar that we originally planned on using. I had trouble finding a minivan from the 90's that we could use for the shoot. During a location scout, Huay and I noticed a Ford Aerostar on the road close to ranch. We followed it. I got out and tried to explain to the man about what we were doing, but he didn't speak any English. I managed to get his number. A fluent Spanish speaker, Simon Quiroz called him some days later. We pegged him as laconic. He would only give one-word responses to anything we had to say. After speaking with his wife, we came to an agreement. He would lend us the van for a day for \$50. A week before the shoot we called to confirm everything and this is when he told us that there was no agreement. We asked to speak to his wife again since she negotiated the deal the previous time, but he insisted that there was no deal.

I had planned to use the combination of a dolly-jib to try and mimic the look of a Steadicam. It proved to be tedious and time-consuming so after a couple of shots we decided to scrap the use of the dolly-jib for the rest of the shoot. This proved to be a problem later on in the shoot as the scene with the rabbit relied heavily on the use of the combination.

We used the Dana dolly instead and were pleased with the ease of use and performance so stuck with that the rest of the shoot.

We ran into a logistical issue while filming the scenes near the van. It wasn't clear where the van was in relation to other areas in the film like the location of the exit sign or

the motherboard so we had to take time out and make a map of where the van was in relation to these other locations on a used pizza box so that there wouldn't be any errors in directionality.

That evening we filmed everything for the first scene on the ranch. We didn't have much time to waste. Magic hour didn't last too long. The weather cooperated and gave us a partly cloudy magic hour. It looks great and Chirag's performance on every take is great especially considering we never rehearsed. We forgot to make fake puke the previous night so Dustin Jesudason, the AD, concocts a bottle of puke using water and crushed cookies. It doesn't taste good. He had to have it in his mouth for a good thirty seconds, too for each of the six takes that required him to puke.

One shot in particular is among one of my favorites. Chirag is partially silhouetted against a patchy, highly contrasted sky that occupies the top half of the background while the bottom half is occupied by the tops of trees. We used a long lens so the space is compressed. Because of the nature of the lens, it's a little soft, muddy and a little noisy since we had to up the ISO to 1000. It's imperfect. But I like it a lot because it's a perfect description of that world.

## **Day Two**

The day started off as overcast. We started a little later in the day since there was no magic hour to be had. We had originally planned on getting stuff around the door in the morning, but postponed that till the evening. We started the day off with shots of Chirag interacting with the motherboard. We were finished with those shots by the afternoon and moved on to close ups of the motherboard with an emphasis on the tablet and LED lights contained on the board. Everything moved at a casual pace and we

thought we got everything we needed. Though I didn't have the macaroni and cheese ready so we had to put Cheetos in the Tupperware instead.

We had a small break while waiting for magic hour to get the shots near the door. I made a couple errors that made this part of the shoot tedious and frustrating. First was the position of the door. The sun set directly behind the door. We thought this would make for an amazing final shot of the movie, but it turned out to be a pain for the other shots. So we had to wait for the sun to hide behind the trees to get the shot of him running into the invisible wall, which would mess with continuity, but I had another shot planned that would actually make that lack of continuity make sense in the context of the world he was in.

I messed up the wall gag that was supposed to occur when he first finds the door. The idea behind the invisible wall was to show that the world was finite and quite small because of a lack of data. My initial instinct was to have him run into an invisible wall somewhere else on the terrain, but for whatever reason I thought it might be more efficient just to have it happen in the scene where he marks the location of the door on the map instead of making it a separate scene. But the framing of the shot was such that it looked as though the wall was already in front of the door despite the LED light shining green. This was confusing. Huay and I both thought something was off about the shot while shooting, but couldn't figure out the solution on the spot.

### **Day Three**

We first tackled the scene where the rabbit gets shot. Since we didn't have the live rabbit until Tuesday, we decided to get everything else besides the two shots of the live

rabbit. The whole shot list for this scene had changed once the dolly-jib combination was scrapped on day one. The shot list called for a lot of movement along the y-axis after the rabbit gets shot. The decision to scrap these moving shots also rested in the fact that it didn't make sense for Chirag to be so far away from the bunny as originally storyboarded. I intended to originally have the dolly jib follow him from behind as he ran towards the rabbit immediately after he shot it and instead of exploding into pixels, keels over and convulses as its bleeding.

This was the most underprepared I was the entire shoot. Since I had to essentially devise an entirely new way to cover the scene we covered it in a rather generic way. Stylistically it's very plain which is my fault in not coming up with an alternate shooting plan in case the dolly-jib fell apart. And because of the cord that was tethered to the animatronic rabbit, we had to keep those shots fairly tight. Either that or do some clever hiding of the chord, which was attached to a smoke alarm that served as an on/off switch for the twitching of the leg.

Luckily, we didn't have any problems with the animatronic rabbit. The previous day saw the rabbit malfunction and I was convinced it was all over. "Fuck it, it's done." But thanks to the ingenuity and patience of Simon, it was repaired and was in fine working order by the next day.

There were no major hiccups when shooting the rabbit scene, it was just more or less figuring out the space and framing since our original plans got scrapped. The scene took maybe a little longer to shoot, but we got everything we needed.

Post-lunch consisted of getting shots of the videos playing off the tablet. I wanted to keep as many things as I could practical. I hate when images are super-imposed on a screen in post so I made the videos beforehand and recorded the tablet playing them to

give a more authentic look. It paid off as the screen is a bit dusty, dirty, and has a few fingerprint marks on the screen which would disappear if the image was superimposed.

The evening consisted of shots by the exit sign. We tried to remedy the issues we encountered the previous day. And after a night of viewing dailies and mulling over I thought I had the solutions. We ended up getting a few shots that worked much better than the original, but the wall gag remained a problem. I got a few shots and figured I'd be able to cobble together something in post.

### **Day Four**

Effects day! This was the day where we would shoot all the plates for the three effects shots. Deepak Chetty, my effects advisor, stopped by to not only advise us as we shot the plates, but he also brought the bunny with him that we were going to use for those two shots of the live bunny we didn't get the previous day.

The first half of the day went well. It was the scene where he has to go to the bathroom and sees the mutated, glitchy grackle. We followed the boards and got our plate shots. No problems.

But I suppose that should've been a red flag. When things go too well it's cause for concern because that usually signals something disastrous on the horizon. Not that what happened next was a disaster more than it was frustrating and deflating.

Chuck was the man who lent us his pet rabbits for us to use on set. Chuck was a burly gentleman who raised a number of rabbits on his property in north Austin. He was kind enough to let us borrow one for the shoot at no charge. When asked if I wanted to take two, he followed up the question by telling me that it was in case one of them ran away or "accidentally" got shot. This was after hearing the nature of the scene with the

rabbit. However, when I called him a couple days before the shoot to confirm what kind of rabbit I would want, he mentioned that he was giving us his sons personal pet rabbit, so it was imperative that he return unharmed.

A friend suggested making a harness out of invisible string for the rabbit so that we could pull on it and make the rabbit jerk in a way that made it look like it was shot. While making the harness, the rabbit was fairly calm and would occasionally wander out of his cage onto the open field without a care in the world. But once the harness was introduced, the rabbit became frightened. Once it came time to shoot, the rabbit would bolt the minute the put it on the ground. It wouldn't stay in one place. It's heart raced. We managed to get the wide shot we needed, but getting the close up of it being shot was impossible. We built a barrier, but the rabbit would lie prone next to the barrier with its breath quickened.

We ultimately decided to pick it up later and moved on as the rabbit had to go back with Deepak later that afternoon.

We moved on to pickups by the motherboard. Shots of it being discovered. Then we got even more shots by the exit door before ending the day by just following Chirag around with the camera as he put on his mask and walked around with the metal detector.

## **Day Five**

The first part of the day consisted of picking up a couple van shots before moving on to more motherboard stuff. The afternoon was saved for Steadicam shots. Huay had practiced with it briefly before coming out to Giddings, but had never run full speed with it so we knew some of these shots were going to take some time to get as Chirag was supposed to be running fairly fast during all of them.

Huay did a fantastic job and got every Steadicam shot I needed before Chirag had to leave. Since he had to work the next day, he had to leave around six whereas we would normally finish the day at around 8 when there was no more light. We got it done and packed the U-Haul. The Giddings portion of the shoot was over. The drive back the next day was awful as it poured the entire way. But I couldn't be happier that the rain waited one more day as it would have been a disaster if it rained the previous day. I ended up having to unload equipment and then having my roommate drive me all the way back to Giddings to pick up my van since everyone who was there on the final day had driven. I made it back home and passed out on my bed. But only briefly for I had to be ready for the weekend shoot.

### **Day Six**

This was supposed to be a light day. And it was. It was the opening scene of the movie and it only took about an hour and a half to shoot. The problem was that the application of the makeup took about 3 or so hours.

I had met with the makeup artist prior to the shoot for a makeup test to, you know, make sure that what I wanted to be done could be done. I had called my actress in so that we could determine whether or not I needed to take a different approach to the scene as Rana, my actress, was supposed to have just undergone chemotherapy and have no hair or eyebrows. The makeup artist had forgotten some of her tools so couldn't do a proper test, but insisted that it would be alright.

The day of, she told me that it was taking a while because she was using materials she had never used before. The makeup also wasn't looking the way we both envisioned it looking. It looked as though my actress was badly cut and scarred along her lower

forehead along what was supposed to be her eyebrows. I think people might have a hard time telling that she's a cancer patient, but I think the point gets across that she is ill or at least not doing well health wise.

The one regret I have in this scene is not writing more dialogue that made it explicit that she was dying. Maybe the conversation should've been between the mother and son about what the son thinks death is. I don't know. Maybe the way it is now is too vague but it felt right at the time I wrote it.

However, it looks great as Haley Anderson did a tremendous job decorating the set and Huay did an awesome job lighting it using only a practical source and sheet of muslin for the opening scene.

## **Day Seven**

This is also known as the day I had Rana stand still and make a bunch of funny faces for the sake of the composite shot that would make her look like she is glitching out. I would have a set sequence of eye, mouth, and eyebrow movements that she was to go through on every take. "Eyes upper right. Blink. Up. Blink. Upper left. Blink. Mouth partially open. Blink. Eyebrows up. Oh no. We have to do it again, Rana. You moved your head. The composite shot won't work if you shift the position of your head."

Everything on the final day went smoothly. We got everything we needed in the allotted time. And that was a wrap on the shoot.

## POST-PRODUCTION

What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Every time I tell people that I'm currently cutting in Sony Vegas that's what I hear. It's gotten to the point where I'll raise a hand halfway through the sentence signaling for them to stop as though the phrase is like nails running down a chalkboard. The reason for cutting in Vegas is simple. I own a PC. It runs. I tried bootlegging Adobe Premiere but it wasn't running stable so went with Vegas. I originally started cutting in Adobe Premiere, but I didn't think I would have access to equipment over the summer so I eventually moved everything over to Vegas until it came time to mix.

The other thing about Vegas is that I'm so familiar with it that I'm never bogged down by anything technical. Editing becomes fun because I can focus on the creative part instead of fighting with the program. In the end I was able to output a Premiere file from Vegas, but it took me a solid day and a half to conform audio in order to output a working OMF from Premiere. A small price to pay for the convenience of being able to edit in my own home.

However, this didn't become a convenience towards the latter part of the editing process when it became very hot in the house and unbearable to stay in during the day. Those days I would end up waiting until the evening to edit as it was just too hot inside the house.

There's not much to say about the editing process. I never transcoded the files. They remained the original ProRes 4:4:4 files I shot on. I edited it the way I had it boarded. I also cut it very tightly the first time around so that it kept moving. It was important that it never felt long which I thought could definitely happen being a solitary endeavor for the most part. In the end I think I went back and added thirty seconds, which seems crazy considering it's usually all about how much you can cut out. But there were

questions of clarity that were brought up when I had screened it for a couple of people that I went back and fixed by adding that footage.

If there's a problem with the movie it lies in the script. Things happen in a fashion that prevented me from switching the order of things in the editing. And honestly, I don't think that switching things around would've done much to clear up any questions that people had anyway. I was aware of the abstract nature of the film and knew the risks of making such a film going in. Ultimately I think people will understand that it's a movie about someone trying to bring a loved one back. I know there will be questions about why the rabbit bleeds, but I'm fine with that as our protagonist is shocked by that development as well. The whole point is that the world wasn't something he created or that he doesn't know well and fully understand which I hope gets across via him needing a map, him needing the metal detector to search far and wide for the motherboard, and the surprise at the grackle exploding.

Though there is a decent amount of sound design, I wanted the world to seem sparse and rather unremarkable. This is why there is only one real instance of a spectacular, unnatural sound effect which is when the grackle explodes. I didn't want there to be sound effects when the van first appeared as I thought that would betray the established tone and aesthetic.

Through sound design I felt that I would be able to make the world seem a little larger. For example, when Chirag first inputs data into the motherboard you hear a vent open and an exhaust fan start to hum. The idea behind that was to create a sense of this entire unseen, massive infrastructure buried underground that enables that little unit to create miracles.

A number of sound effects were compiled before shooting. Actually sound design informed some of the production as I based shots and sequences around certain sounds.

For instance the whole sequence where the bird gets shot was based off a series of sounds I compiled and put together to make the explosion and implosion effect. Another was the droning of the crickets and frogs that's heard when we first see the protagonist as an adult. That droning noise inspired the long take when he pukes and parses through the bag to find his dust mask. The metal detector sequence where the detector finally picks up something was all inspired by the sound that I had found well beforehand. It's two shots, but the sound informed my decision to shoot those two on a telephoto lens as well as the type of headphones he uses. Because I wanted large, over-the-ear headphones, I made the decision to keep the sound design from the perspective of what's being played through those. While unpleasant, I found the white noise totally engrossing. I thought there should be a crackling noise instead of the long, warbling sound that signals a metal object, but the crackling might have been confused for an area of high radiation content so I stuck with the warbling sound instead.

## REFLECTIONS

I'm much happier with my thesis film compared to my pre-thesis. I just feel like I made less compromises with my thesis film than I did with my pre-thesis. But considering that the pre-thesis is on a much tighter schedule that almost seems inevitable.

There are a couple things that didn't make the cut. The biggest thing being the whole idea of a stitched together world. The picture that inspired the whole thing and specific shot in the beginning of the movie didn't end up making the cut due to a lack of time. We weren't fortunate enough to get a completely sunny day. We needed one to get the type of composite shot that would create the same type of panels seen in the rover photo. We needed about five hours towards the end of the day to shoot an extreme wide shot of Chirag walking across a pre-determined terrain over and over again with a locked-off camera during this period. After doing a simple composite in post-production, adjacent panels would've shown stark differences in the time of day which would've conveyed the idea of a world that was stitched together using existing data. I tested this out on my own and the panel idea came across, but the day I ran the test it was so cloudy that the stark difference in light wasn't as apparent as it would have been on a sunny day.

Student films always seem compromised. But the trick is to find a way to minimize the amount of compromise. I feel like I was more successful in mitigating compromise than previous endeavors. So in that regard, my thesis can be considered a success as for the most part I felt as though not much was lost in translation from script to screen. Of course there are many things I wish I would have done a little differently, but nothing that would have completely altered the course of the film. So I think I can say that I'll walk away from the university pleased with what I've done can only hope that I'll

continue to have access to the same resources in the future. And who knows, the next film might even be a tad bit more coherent.

# APPENDIX

## UNCANNY VALLEY

Written by

Roshan Murthy

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A MOTHER reads to her seven year old son, ANISH, in bed. She is recovering from chemotherapy and is wearing a bald cap and has no eyebrows. He is half asleep, left arm dangling off the side of his bed. His hand houses a brand new Nintendo Power Glove.

MOTHER

I wonder what this place is? Are they real? I don't know. We'll find out tomorrow.

She puts the book down. With some effort and a little bit of strain she gets off the bed to tuck him in and attempts to take off the Power Glove on his right hand. Anish squeals until she takes her hand off of it.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(in Arabic)

Alright, Anish. Do you want to say your prayer?

Anish moans.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Ok. Go ahead.

Anish farts.

His mother laughs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

How about I say it? Ok?

Anish moans again.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Ok.

She leans in close to him.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Thank you for my son. I love him very much. Thank you for my family. Because love is very important. Thank you for our health. Thank you for our life. Thank you for all the beautiful things.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - DAY

Anish, now in his twenties, is crouched and pants heavily. He is wearing a heavily modified Power Glove. He sits against a lavender blue sky in the middle of an open field. Next to him sits a bag and a metal detector. He attempts to get up. He becomes too nauseous to rise further and holds this position. He eventually pukes.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a dust mask. He puts it on before putting on the bag and grabbing the metal detector.

Anish rises into the frame. He looks outward at a background that looks stitched together. Two-thirds of it is a sunset while the other third looks like it's about noon. He admires the construct.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - DAY

Anish is standing next to a door in the middle of the field with an exit sign attached the top. Anish pulls out what looks like an old manual. He flips to a page with a crude, unfinished map. He erases the word "Exit" from one place and writes it in another, making a landmark of this location on the crude map.

What Anish fails to notice is a small LED light near the door handle that glows green. There is a corresponding red light next to it that is not currently lit.

Anish then looks away from the map to see where he is in relation to the map, looks at the map one more time with his eyes resting on the place that's marked with an X before closing the manual.

Anish walks in the open field with a stitched together background.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - DAY

Anish has the metal detector out. He walks and sways the detector from left to right as though it's a blind man's cane. The metal detector eventually makes a noise. Anish stops.

Anish digs with a small hand shovel. At about a foot deep he finally strikes a metal object.

A faceplate with USB, VGA, and HDMI inputs that is embedded in the ground is revealed. A red and green LED is embedded on unit, with the green one activated.

Anish pulls out a tablet computer out of his backpack.

He plugs the tablet computer in to the USB port.

He taps the tablet a couple times. A prompt appears on the tablet. It looks like an old Dos prompt that reads "Analysing".

An LED light on the faceplate turns from green to red. A vent is opened and heard from way beneath the ground before the humming of what seems like a exhaust fan is activated.

After the "Analysing" screen reaches 100%, a series of pictures and video of a minivan appear on the tablet before another prompt appears that reads "Processing". Once it hits 100% the tablet goes blank.

The LED light turns from back from red to green.

A minivan appears where before there was just empty field.

Anish looks back at the van.

Anish swipes the tablet computer with his finger a few times and then taps it a couple times.

The tablet computer shows images of Anish's old room followed by pictures of the exterior of his old house.

Anish pulls out some macaroni and cheese in a plastic container from his bag. It is moldy. He decides to eat it anyway.

INT. VAN - DAY

Anish tries to start the van. It's a bit fussy, but finally starts.

EXT. CONSTRUCT, JUST OUTSIDE WOODS - DAY

Anish drives off. The van sounds like a pod racer.

INT. VAN - DAY

Anish approaches his house which lies in the middle of an open field.

EXT. FIELD DAY

Anish creeps towards the door.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anish opens the door to his old bedroom. Anish takes a look around the room. There are a variety of items that he picks up and looks at, including a pump action BB gun.

Anish takes out a rabbit from his bag. He removes it and puts it in the cage.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - DAY

Anish connects the tablet computer to the faceplate once more.

Pictures, old VHS recordings and other data of his mother is input and being analyzed. Again, a red LED light is activated during the process.

An old VHS recording of him and his mother during what looks like a birthday party plays. Anish has his Power Glove on his hand. His aunt is recording the video.

EXT. PATIO - DAY

AUNT (O.S.)

You like your present?

Anish nods. He puts his hand that houses the Power Glove on his mom's head, shakes his hand on her head and makes an electrocution noise with his mouth.

ANISH

Feel better?

His mother takes his hand and puts it down away from her head. Anish continues to put his hand towards his head despite her resistance towards it. The camera zooms in on her. She looks towards the camera.

MOTHER

Don't zoom in.

AUNT (O.S.)

I'm not.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS)

Anish is watching the video when his stomach starts to bother him. The moldy macaroni has not sat well.

He grimaces.

CUT TO:

Anish is seen squatting on the ground with his pants down by his knees.

He strains as he's slightly constipated. He hears a noise. He darts his head to his left, then to his right.

He sees what looks like a deformed, somewhat polygonal grackle jumping up and down from a fallen tree trunk in predictable intervals and patterns. It makes a very abrasive, sharp noise that clips at points.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anish takes the BB gun from his room.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - DAY

Anish pumps the BB gun. After a few pumps it becomes exceedingly difficult to put the pump handle back underneath the gun as the air is heavily compressed already.

Anish gets into a position he likes, looks down the sight, closes one eye and aims. He fires.

It hits the bird in the head. The head explodes into tiny polygonal fragments before imploding into a single point, but the rest of the body is intact and it continues to jump up and down.

Anish shoots the bird in the chest. The entire thing explodes into exact same way before regenerating a few seconds later.

Anish then points the gun towards his own fingers. He can't bring himself to shoot his own hand.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anish takes the rabbit out of the cage.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - DAY

Anish gets down into a comfortable position and then positions the gun and aims down the sight.

The rabbit is grazing in the field.

He pulls his head away from the gun to look at the bunny one more time before looking down the sight once again. Anish puts his finger on the trigger and re-positions the gun one last time. He holds his breath, closes one eye and then fires.

The bullet hits the rabbit. But it doesn't explode like the bird. Instead, it enters the lung, causing the rabbit to fall over on its side and start to convulse while bleeding from the wound.

Anish runs towards the rabbit.

Anish touches the wound and sees the blood on his finger.

ANISH

What the fuck? What the fuck?

Anish wanders around before sitting back down by the ailing rabbit.

INT. VAN - DAY

Anish tries to start the car. It's fussy again, but this time it doesn't start.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - DAY

Anish runs towards the exit with rabbit in hand, but runs into an invisible wall before reaching the door.

Anish drops the rabbit. He picks it back up before trying to breach the wall. He cannot. He bangs on the wall with his fist.

A small, red LED light close to the handle glows brightly.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - DAY

The tablet sits at the base of the faceplate. Processing is only 64% complete. The red LED light at the top of the unit glows brightly.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - DAY

Anish notices the red LED light. He turns and starts back towards the faceplate.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - EARLY EVENING

Anish tries to stop by progress of the facsimile, but can't abort it. He comes close to breaking the faceplate but restrains himself.

He attempts to finish the rabbit off with the BB gun, but can't bring himself to do it. The rabbit is breathing heavily while occasionally making a grating, grunting noise.

Anish looks over at the progress bar. It's at 99%. It turns to 100%, but then it goes back to 0% as the text changes from "Processing..." to "Finalizing...".

Anish pounds his fist on the ground. The progress bar takes some time to go from 0-1%.

Anish waits, but then pulls out the cord.

The LED light turns from a solid red to a blinking red.

A siren that sounds much like an air raid siren can be heard in the distance.

Anish grabs the rabbit.

He runs towards the exit door. Something catches his eye, prompting him to look towards his left. He then comes to a sudden stop.

From a distance, he sees curtains being drawn closed from his room.

He is at a complete stop. His gaze is fixed on the house.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Anish opens the door to his room and slowly approaches a figure sitting on the bed who is revealed to be his mother. She has a fixed smile on her face.

ANISH

Ma?

She stands up.

ANISH (CONT'D)

Ma. It's me.

Anish opens his arms as if to signal her to come hug him.

His mother continues to smile.

Her eyes shift unnaturally from Anish down to the glove.

ANISH (CONT'D)

You remember this?

Anish takes it off.

ANISH (CONT'D)

This damn thing.

Anish tries to hand it to her. It falls from her hands as she never clasps her fingers together.

Anish picks it up.

ANISH (CONT'D)

You remember that old man with  
halitosis who took the last one?

Her eyes and mouth start to twitch.

ANISH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I made you fight with the  
store manager for the display  
model. And I'm even more sorry I  
made you return it. The damn  
peripheral button stuck.

Her expression switches back to the smile.

Anish loses his train of thought.

ANISH (CONT'D)

Man you looked so tired. God I'm  
sorry I made you even more  
miserable.

MOTHER

Don't zoom in.

The fidelity of the response is equivalent to a VHS  
recording.

ANISH

What?

MOTHER

Yes.

ANISH

How are you feeling, ma?

MOTHER

I love you.

The words sound heavily processed.

ANISH

I love you, too, M..

All of a sudden a harrowing sounding shriek comes from her mouth. It switches back and forth again between a smile and a frown and even the front of her face starts to glitch.

ANISH (CONT'D)

Ma?

No acknowledgement. Anish hits the glove against the wall hoping for something to change.

No change.

He pounds against the wall again.

One of the blows causes the outline of his mother to turn into the BSOD (blue screen of death) for a split second before returning to herself.

He pounds the glove one more time, breaking it.

His mother lets out one last shriek before disappearing completely.

Anish sits down on his bed.

The rabbit lets out a series of elongated whimpers and its breathing is very labored. It sounds as though its in a lot of pain.

Anish turns his attention towards the rabbit. He pets the rabbit a few times before breaking its neck.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (WOODS) - DAY

Anish lays the rabbit in the hole where the faceplate resides. He no longer has the glove on.

The rabbit, Power Glove, and tablet computer all lie on top the faceplate.

The tablet computer is playing the VHS recording of the birthday party still, but it is on a constant one second loop of his mother in the same close up looking off in the distance.

EXT. CONSTRUCT (FIELD) - EARLY EVENING

Anish runs towards the exit.

END.

PROJECT NAME:  
UNCANNY VALLEY

PAGE NUMBER:  
1

**SHOT # 1A**



Studio - Day 1

CAMERA:  
25mm - F4 - Dolly in

**ACTION:**  
Dolly in on entire scene.  
One time w/ no dolly.

**Props:** rabbit, cage, unmodified  
glove,  
**Makeup:** Mom (bald cap, had,  
eyebrows)

**SHOT # 1B**



Studio - Day 1

CAMERA:  
25mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
CU mother whispering into  
son's ear.

**Makeup:** Mom (bald cap, had,  
eyebrows)

**SHOT # 1C**



Studio - Day 1

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Mother reads to son. Tilt  
down as mother leans down  
and whispers into son's ear.

**Makeup:** Mom (bald cap, had,  
eyebrows)

PROJECT NAME:  
UNCANNY VALLEY

PAGE NUMBER:  
2

SHOT # 1D

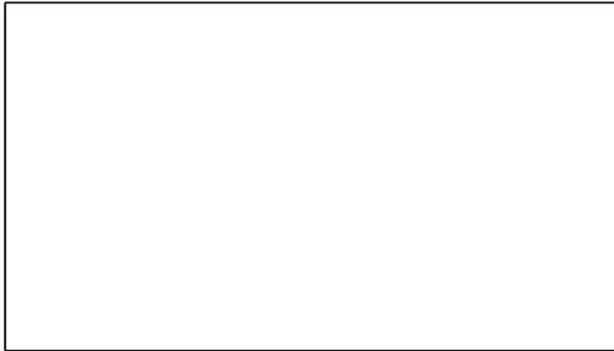


CAMERA:  
25mm - F2.8/4 - Jib

**ACTION:**  
Jib down towards power  
glove on Jeff's hand.  
**Props: unmodified power glove**

3 PM (Studio)

SHOT # 2A



CAMERA:  
25MM - F2.8/4 - Jib

**ACTION:**  
Same as shot 1D, except  
outdoors in Construct.  
Match cut.  
**Props: Modified Power  
Glove, (maybe E.T. carts)**

Early morning

SHOT # 2B



CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8

**ACTION:**  
Chirag finishes puking. Spits  
a couple times before put-  
ting on mask.  
**Props: glove, metal detector,  
bag, mask**

Early Morning

PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

3

**SHOT # 2C**



CAMERA:  
200 MM F 4.5 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag rises into frame and turns his head to his right. Looks up and down taking in what he sees around him.  
**Props: Glove, bag, metal detector, mask.**

Morning, against a Lavender sky? Or maybe half sky, half trees? Or all trees as depicted above?

**SHOT # 3A**

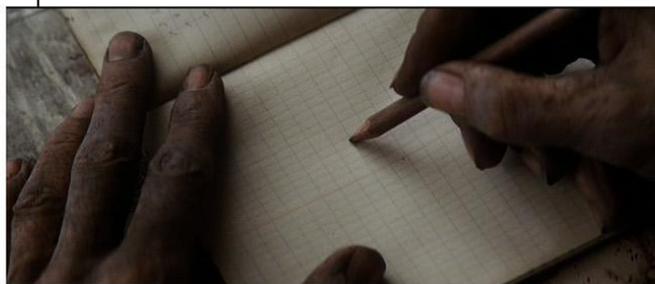


CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4 - Dana Dolly

**ACTION:**  
Dolly in on door.  
**Props: Door, solid green LED and lit up Exit sign.**

Morning/Evening (shaded area)

**SHOT # 3B**



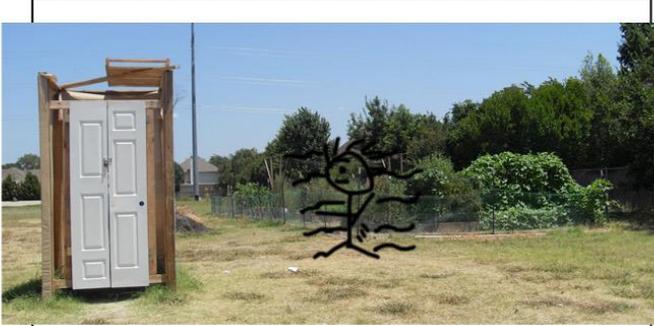
CAMERA:  
25mm F4/5.6 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag erases old location of exit sign and pencils in new one.  
**Props: Glove, pencil (w/eraser), Manual. Long, disgusting fingernails.**

Day (diffuse, even light)

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>4</b>
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**SHOT # 3C**



Morning/Evening (shaded area)

CAMERA: **VFX shot**  
25mm F5.6/8 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag marks on map, gets up, runs into invisible wall. Changes direction. Runs into invisible wall again.  
**Props: Glove, bag, metal detector, mask, Door w/green LED and lit exit sign.**

**SHOT # 4A**



Noon to sunset OR Dawn to noon

CAMERA: **Composite shot**  
25mm - F8 (will vary) - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Composite shot of Chirag walking through construct. WILL TAKE 5-6 HOURS.  
**Props: Glove, bag, metal detector, mask.**

**SHOT # 5A**



Around 10 AM

CAMERA:  
200mm - F4.5 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Pan from left to right. Chirag searching for the motherboard.  
**Props: Glove, mask, metal detector, headphones. Bag on ground somewhere.**

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 5
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**SHOT # 5B**



Around 10 AM

CAMERA:  
200 MM - F4.5 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
CU Chirag listening as metal detector makes a noise.

**Props:** Headphones, metal detector, mask.

**SHOT # 5C**



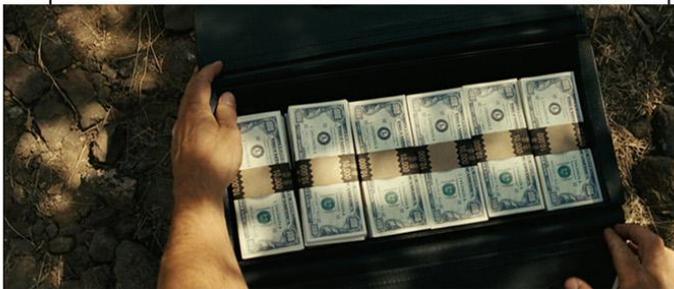
11AM or 1PM

Composite: (2 part shot)  
CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks.

**ACTION:**  
Chirag digs for the motherboard. Opens the panel, pulls out tablet, connects it to motherboard. Waits and then turns to see van in field.

**Props:** Motherboard, glove, metal detector, bag, tablet, van, hand shovel. mask

**SHOT # 5D**



11AM-4PM (will be diffused, even light)

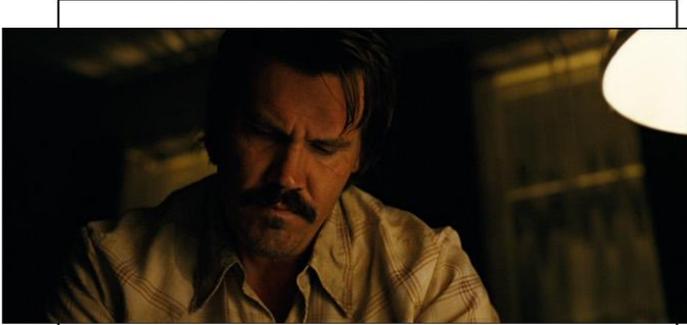
CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Jib

**ACTION:**  
Same as 5C. CU of wiping dirt off panel, tablet being connected and processing data. Possible jib down.

**Props:** mother board, tablet, LED lights, glove, hand shovel

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 6
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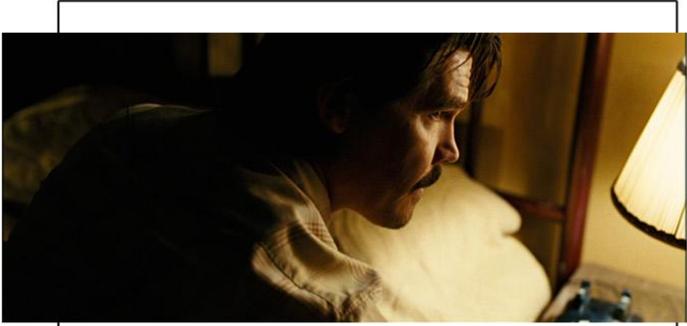
**SHOT # 5E**



Noon-ish

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks, Dolly  
(later part of shot)  
**ACTION:**  
Same as 5C. Chirag looks to-  
wards van. Dolly in on  
second look up after he  
inputs data for house. Takes  
off mask on second look up.  
**Props: mask**

**SHOT # 5F**



Noon-ish

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - possible  
dolly in  
**ACTION:**  
First time Chirag looks to-  
wards van. Possible dolly in,  
but probably not.  
**Props: mask, glove**

**SHOT # 6A**



Around 1 PM

CAMERA:  
50mm - F4/5.6 - Sticks  
**ACTION:**  
Chirag starts the car. It  
struggles until it finally  
starts.  
**Props: Glove**

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 7
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**SHOT # 7A**

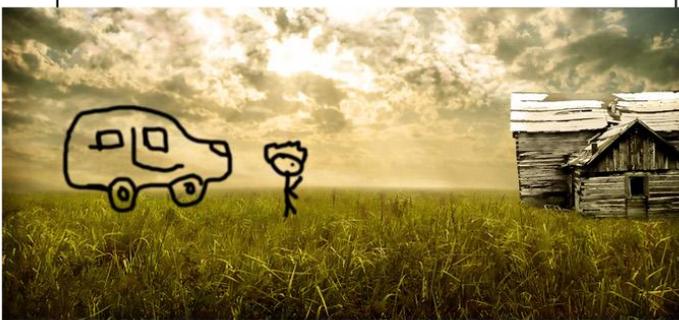


1PM

CAMERA:  
50mm - F4, handheld

**ACTION:**  
Chirag drives towards house. (Get 2 locations)  
**Props: Glove**

**SHOT # 7B**



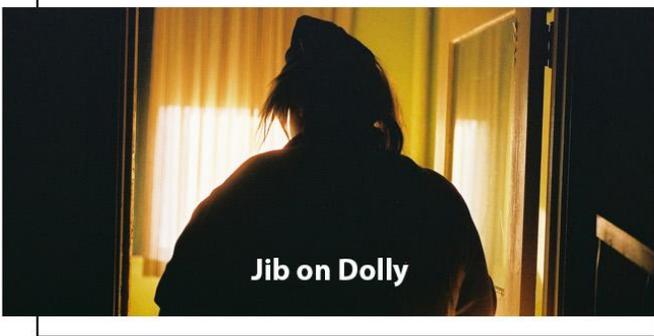
1 PM

**VFX Shot (need plate)**

CAMERA:  
25mm - F8 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag walks towards suburban looking house in middle of the field.  
**Props: Glove, bag**

**SHOT # 8A**



Studio - Day 2

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8 Jib on Dolly

**ACTION:**  
Free and loose on jib as dolly follows Chirag into room. He explores his old room, finds bb guns and puts rabbit in cage.  
**Props: rabbit, bb guns, glove, bag**

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>8</b>
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**SHOT # 9A**



CAMERA:  
50mm - F4, Tracking

**ACTION:**  
Chirag walks back to the van.

**Props:** glove, bag

**SHOT # 10A**



CAMERA:  
25mm - F4, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag starts the processing of his mother.

**Props:** glove, motherboard, RED led light on

**SHOT # 10B**



CAMERA:  
50mm - F4, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag is eating a sandwich while watching his mother being processed by the tablet. Stomach gurgles as he has gas. Makes a face.

**Props:** glove, bag

PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

9

**SHOT # 10C**



CAMERA:  
85mm - F5.6 Sticks

**ACTION:**  
CU of Chirag stomach gur-  
gling

Afternoon

**SHOT # 11A**



CAMERA:  
25mm - F8 Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag is taking a dump. CU  
on 85mm F5.6 of him react-  
ing to sound of bird.  
**Props: glove**

Afternoon

**SHOT # 11B**



**VFX Shot**

CAMERA:  
50mm - F5.6

**ACTION:**  
Bird jumps up and down and  
on trunk as Chirag looks on.

11 AM

PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

10

SHOT # 11C



CAMERA:

50mm - F5.6, Dolly

ACTION:

Dolly in as Chirag, still squatting, looks at bird in tree.

11 AM

SHOT # 12A



CAMERA:

35mm - F2.8/4, Sticks

ACTION:

Tilt up as Chirag grabs BB Guns from beneath bed in bedroom and shakes to see if any BB's are left in the gun.

Props: glove, BB gun

1 PM - Studio

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L  
T

SHOT #



CAMERA:

ACTION:

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 11
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**SHOT # 13A**



(This angle. Cowboy. Have foreground objects.)

11:30 AM

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag pumps gun. Has trouble doing so.

**Props: gun, glove**

**SHOT # 13B**



11AM

**VFX Shot**  
CAMERA:  
50mm - F5.6, Sticks (or jib down while tilting up?)

**ACTION:**  
Chirag has trouble, but eventually gets it and lifts up his gun, takes aim, and fires. Bird explodes into pixels and then implodes into single point. Reappears.

**Props: gun, glove**

**SHOT # 13C**



Noon

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4, Dolly?

**ACTION:**  
Chirag brings gun down, bird reappears. Chirag pulls out bb handgun and attempts to blow his hand off as we dolly in. Decides against it.

**Props: gun, glove**

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>12</b>
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**SHOT # 14A**



Studio - Day 2

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag gets bunny out of cage.

**Props: rabbit, cage, glove**

**SHOT # 15A**



CAMERA:

**ACTION:**

**SHOT # 15B**



12:30 PM

CAMERA:  
35mm - F2.8/4 - Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag pumps. Has trouble. Turns to side pumps some more. Gets frustrated and throws gun down and pulls out bb handgun. Shoots rabbit. Puts gun down.

**Props: gun, rabbit, fake rabbit, glove**

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>13</b>
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SHOT # 15D

**DOLLY IN ON FAKE RABBIT CONVULSING ON GROUND.**

1:30 PM

CAMERA:

ACTION:

SHOT # 15E



12:30 PM

SHOT # 15F



1 PM

CAMERA:

50mm - F5.6 - Dolly

ACTION:

Same as 15C. Dolly in after lowering gun.

Props: gun, glove

CAMERA:

50mm - F5.6 - Steadicam or dolly with jib.

ACTION:

Chirag runs towards rabbit. Gets down on one knee and touches the wound. Sees blood on his fingers.

Props: gun, glove, fake rabbit, fake blood

SHOT # 15G



2:00 PM

CAMERA:  
50mm - F5.6, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag walks towards, bends down, and checks rabbit. Checks fingers, sees blood on hands.

**Props:** Glove, gun, fake rabbit

SHOT # 15G



SHOT # 15H



2:30 PM

CAMERA:

**ACTION:**

CAMERA:  
35mm - F4, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag picks up rabbit and has it in his hands. He is a bit panicked.

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>15</b>
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SHOT # 16A



CAMERA:  
50mm F5.6 - Dolly (tracking)

**ACTION:**  
Dolly tracks as Chirag hurries towards the van.

**Props: Rabbit, glove, van**  
(Or could dolly in, then pan over towards driver seat of van for rest of shot)

3 PM

SHOT # 16B



CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4 - Dolly

**ACTION:**  
Dolly in as Chirag tries to start car. It won't fire up.

**Props: Rabbit, glove, van**

3 PM

SHOT # 17A



**VFX Shot**  
CAMERA:  
25mm - F8 - Steadicam or Dolly

**ACTION:**  
Chirag runs for Exit and slams into invisible wall, dropping the rabbit.

**Props: rabbit, glove, exit door.**

PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

16

SHOT # 17B



3 PM or Morning (depends)

**VFX shot**

CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4, sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag pounds on invisible wall trying to gain access to the door.

**Props:** exit door, glove, fake rabbit

SHOT # 18A



Tracking Shot

2 PM

CAMERA:  
50mm F5.6, Dolly tracking

**ACTION:**  
Chirag goes past van with rabbit in hand towards the motherboard.

**Props:** glove, fake rabbit

SHOT # 19A



2 PM

CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4, Sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag swipes the tablet a few times before seeing the progress of his mother. He fidgets as he contemplates whether or not he pulls the plug. Doesn't. Processing changes to finalizing. He gets frustrated. Unplugs it.

**Props:** van, glove, fake rabbit, tablet

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: <b>17</b>
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**SHOT # 17C**

**45 degrees off axis of door. Dolly into the LED light glowing red.**

CAMERA: 35mm F2.8 - Dolly in

**ACTION:**  
**Props: Door, red LED light.**

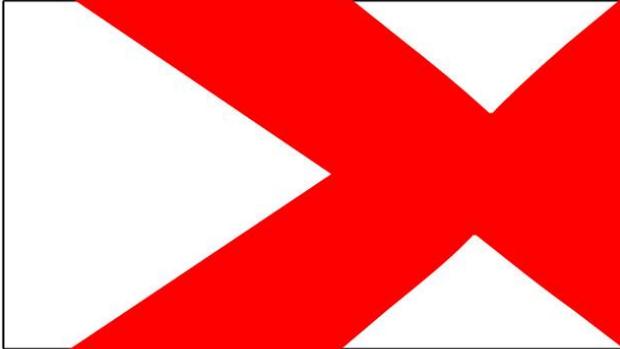
**SHOT # 17D**



CAMERA:  
25mm F4 - Jib down

**ACTION:**  
Jib down. Light is red as tablet is still processing mother.  
**Props: tablet, motherboard**

**SHOT #**



PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

18

SHOT # 19B



CAMERA:

25mm F4, Sticks

**ACTION:**

Processing screen. Then finalizing screen. Then CU switch from green LED to blinking red LED.

**Props: glove, motherboard, LED lights, tablet**

11AM-4PM (even, diffused light)

SHOT # 19C



CAMERA:

80mm F5.6, Sticks

**ACTION:**

Chirag pulls the plug. Siren goes off. Chirag looks for direction of siren.

**Props: glove, fake rabbit**

6 PM

SHOT # 20A



CAMERA:

35mm F2.8/4, Tracking

**ACTION:**

Track Chirag as he jogs past van, but something catches his eye. He stops and turns to his left. Pauses. Continues to walk past van then stops again. Turns. Then walks to left out of frame.

**Props: Glove, fake rabbit**

6 PM

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 19
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**SHOT # 20B**

**Insert of exterior of house. See the curtains being closed shut.**

CAMERA: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ACTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**SHOT # 21A**



Studio - Day 2

CAMERA: \_\_\_\_\_

35mm F2.8/4 , Tracking

**ACTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Camera tracks back with

Chirag as he slowly ap-

proaches the bed. Get CU

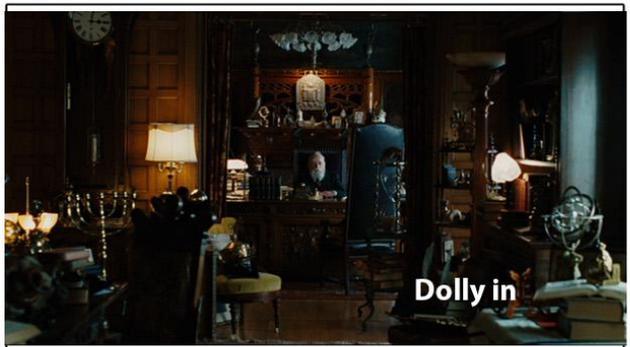
(50mm, F4) after.

**Props: fake rabbit, glove**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**SHOT # 21B**



Studio - Day 2

CAMERA: \_\_\_\_\_

25mm F4/5.6, Dolly in

**ACTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Dolly in as mother sits, smil-

ing on bed. Then rises.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 20
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**SHOT # 21C**



CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4, sticks

**ACTION:**  
MCU and CU (50mm, F4) of mother during dialogue scene.

Studio - Day 2

**SHOT # 21D**

**Insert of mother's hand reaching out, but drops glove when handed to her because she is unable to clasp hand.**

CAMERA:

**ACTION:**

Studio - Day 2

**SHOT # 21E**



CAMERA:  
25mm F4/5.6, sticks

**ACTION:**  
Chirag takes a seat on bed and cracks the neck of rabbit.

Studio - Day 2

PROJECT NAME:	PAGE NUMBER: 21
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**SHOT # 21F**



CAMERA:  
50mm F4, dolly in

**ACTION:**  
Chirag cracks neck of rabbit. It convulses a bit before stopping. Chirag is exasperated.  
**Props: fake rabbit**

Studio - Day 2

**SHOT # 22A**

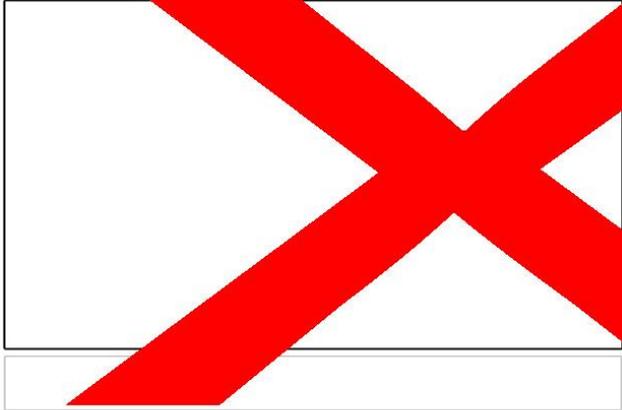


CAMERA:  
25mm F4, Jib down

**ACTION:**  
Chirag throws rabbit, then power glove in on top of rabbit and throws dirt back over the motherboard spot.  
**Props: fake rabbit, glove.**

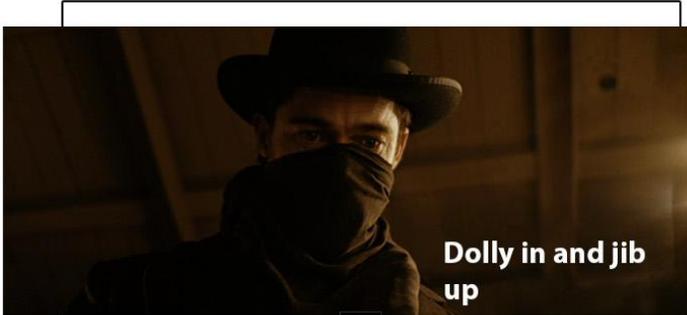
11AM-4PM (diffuse, even light)

**SHOT #**



**ACTION:**

SHOT # 22B



CAMERA:  
35mm F2.8/4, Dolly, Jib?

**ACTION:**  
Crawl in to CU of Chirag's face looking down at grave.

Early Evening

SHOT # 22B



CAMERA:

**ACTION:**

Early Evening

SHOT # 22C

**Insert of tablet next to abandoned bag. Repeating footage of mother plays on screen.**

CAMERA:

**ACTION:**  
**Props: tablet, metal detector, bag**

Early Evening

PROJECT NAME:

PAGE NUMBER:

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SHOT # 23A



CAMERA:  
25mm F8, Steadicam

**ACTION:**  
Chirag running out of woods.

Magic Hour

SHOT # 23B



CAMERA:  
25mm F8, Steadicam

**ACTION:**  
Chirag running past van.

Magic Hour

SHOT # 23C



CAMERA:  
25mm F8, Steadicam

**ACTION:**  
Chirag runs towards exit.  
**Props: exit door**

Magic Hour