

'THE POSTMAN'

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Logline: The tale of an anxious man, a baked bean sale, and a mysterious letter

Synopsis: One windy Wednesday morning a man receives a letter that he is afraid to open. Exploring the ways in which our personalities define our perception of reality, this film follows the experiences of two very different people as they go through the same day.

Does the postman know the ramifications of his delivery?

And how will the shop ever get rid of all those beans?

SELF REFLECTION

When I started my film 'The Postman', I wasn't sure what the storyline was going to be, but I had a character in mind from the beginning. This character (called 'Him'/'He') was a tricky person to pin down, I wasn't sure how to incorporate him into a storyline when I didn't really know who he was yet. I began the process of making this film by spending time getting to know his personality, what he did and didn't like, how he felt about others and how he interpreted the world. I drew and animated 'Him' in different situations, a process that I feel lets the character develop personality traits that feel more naturalistic. 'He' turned out to be a nervous wreck, (a clear reflection of my feelings during the design process) and I found my mental health intertwined with his. This seems to be a recurring theme with my characters, what I feel, they feel- although at the time I may not realise this. This organic link I felt between the character and myself was encouraging, and kickstarted the film to life.



The film opens with the protagonist in a hospital and comes full circle to end it there as a loop. This stemmed from the feeling of wanting to 'escape'. In the past I've found myself stuck in situations where I felt the strong 'fight or flight' urge to leave, but where a door/conventional exit was not available. I thought it would be funny to incorporate these real world experiences into the film somehow by having my character try and escape in a ridiculous way, and came to the image of him in a hospital gown, hiding in a bush at the opening of the film (as seen in an early sketch to the left).

Although the bush idea was scrapped, I liked the potential drama of him being in the hospital in the introduction to the film. I also from a very early stage was keen to have the storyline as a loop, with the beginning being the end and vice versa. I was wary of being cliched by doing this and so it took a while to figure out the best way to approach the structure.

When watching films in general I always enjoy trying to figure out what will happen next, and I think I've managed to make a film where if I was watching it for the first time, I would be unable to predict the next sequence of events. My hope is that others will experience the same, and want to watch it again with the context of having seen it already.

I was and am influenced by films that have puzzled me during the first watch, that left me with so many questions I had to rewatch. I adore those films because of the way I was pulled into a world where I was immersed in the filmmakers rules completely, and where time wasn't presented in a linear way. These films made me want to figure out what I missed, why I couldn't predict the outcome and what the filmmaker was trying to tell me.



Donnie Darko is an example of one of these films, and remains as one of my favourites. I think I took elements from that film and put them into 'The Postman' without even knowing I had done so. Donnie Darko is a beautiful, complex story about a young man struggling with his perception of the world, trying to distinguish his hallucinations from the real world and, ultimately

choosing the hallucinations. The film tackles the subject of time travel, and contains a looping paradox. Although I did not touch on time travel or paradoxes, there are echoes of the film within my own, for example in the looping start and end, and that both films are about someone trying to cope with their mental health and how they perceive the world.

A second film that touches on the similar themes is Fight Club, as it weaves in and out of the protagonists alter ego state and his real life state without the audience knowing. Watching it back you can see how clues have been dropped for you as the viewer to pick up on. The more you watch, the more you gain.



Yet another film in the same vein is 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind', and this film, like Donnie Darko plays with the concepts of time not being linear, and of mental health and memory creating a skewed version of the world., it's fantastical and magical but touches on deeper issues of self esteem and mental illness. I love the way that you are pulled through Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind by the music and the cameras so that you feel almost disoriented.



I tried in my work to have some element of that feeling, I want whoever is watching to feel immersed and pulled along by the story and music. To try and achieve this I tried to make the film move forward as much as possible. I tried to make the only time that feeling comes to a standstill be when the two characters interact in the shop. I did this to try and show awkwardness and make it feel more jolting to show the tension between the two characters caused by his anxiety.



The three films mentioned above created very visually striking and memorable images; for Donnie Darko it's a scene set in a cinema, as the protagonist talks to his imaginary friend 'Frank' while his girlfriend sleeps, In Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind it's a colourful scene where two adults sit under the table within a past memory, one dressed as his childhood self in children's pajamas, and for Fight Club it's the final scene, where two characters wait for city wide explosions as they stand in a skyscraper holding hands.

I took these as inspiration, as I have remembered those moments since first seeing those films, and I wanted to try and create some memorable moments within my own film. From the very start of the project the image of a door underwater was in my head as a moment I really wanted to animate, and I am so glad that I found a way to incorporate it into the film. This started the process of exploring backgrounds for the film.

In the early stages of development I drew the backgrounds on paper and painted them with acrylic paint, experimenting with how the acrylic looked. I was then going to digitally animate the characters on top. However I did not feel that the painted backgrounds had enough definition or that they achieved the more vivid colours I was aiming for. I could have altered them digitally, but in some ways it felt like that defeated the point of painting them at all. I regret deciding not to go with acrylic early on, and I think I should have spent more time trying to get the desired effect using these backgrounds. Part of the reason I was tempted



to have acrylic, hand painted backgrounds was due to the beauty of films like 'The Village' by Mark Baker (as seen below) The backgrounds in that film are so delicate but so clear, they seem simple but complex. I had aspirations of creating something similar but in the end I felt that I had more advantage by creating the background digitally. I don't regret making the backgrounds digital, however I do wish I had spent more time experimenting with ways in which I could have achieved the look I was happier with. The digital colours feel more flat, and solid, but I do think they work with the animation as it is. I'm not sure I could have done the backgrounds justice if I had chosen to then use digital animation.

In this digital age, it feels like films that use hand drawn backgrounds, cel animation and techniques like oil on glass are a dying art form. I love that animation is a constantly changing and evolving process, and that technology is so advanced that it is possible to animate a five minute film from your bedroom with just a tablet. However, I feel a huge part of the charm of animations that use more traditional techniques lies in the textures and hand drawn feel. There are films that are animated still using these techniques, but it seems to be that like many other aspects of modern life, convenience has become more of a priority. I chose the convenient option of animating entirely digitally, and whilst it worked for this film, I would like to spend time really exploring other animation techniques such as drawing cels, oil and sand on glass, and charcoal animation and actually, actively pursuing them rather than choosing convenience.



Hand drawn aspects aside, I did choose to go with digital drawing and colours. I tried to use colours as a reflection of the mood, the blue and grey hues for him, the brighter yellows for her, and a culmination when they were together. I wanted the bean world to be fantastical, with the masses of moving purple as a representation of it being a 'dream world'. I wanted the whole thing to feel like it could have come from a storybook, and really enjoyed the colouring and drawing the backgrounds.

I am sure I was influenced by plenty of films that have used this technique when colouring, but the one that stuck in my mind throughout the process was 'Coraline'. Coraline uses duller colours to represent the real world, and brighter colours for the Other world. I attempted to do this, and though I think the colouring overall for the film is nice looking, I think if I recoloured I would try and make the real

world more drab with a more intense use of grey. I still had bright colours in the real world but



had more blocks of bright colour in the dream/bean world. The brightest areas of the film are the hospital at the very end, and Her house. This is primarily because I felt that it was a good idea to make these spaces light and bright because there is conflict resolution in the hospital, and because she is not around him at this point, and around his fear that darkens his perception of the world. I would have liked to spend more time on the colour theory for this film, but that is down to some poor time management and is a lesson learned for future projects.



I knew I wanted to have a protagonist who was anxious, so I decided to make the most of this and go down the route that the aforementioned films did; misinterpretation of your environment. As someone who has a very bad anxiety condition, I have had moments of interpreting things the wrong way, and making assumptions that feed into and (unfortunately) validate

my anxiety. This film is by no means a mental health campaign, but was definitely an outlet and a fun way to experiment with how anxiety can be represented. I needed a second character for him to be compared to, and so 'She'/'Her' was created. I wanted her to feel more detached from every situation until she was around her grandfather, who she would soften around. I like the way that she is quite blasé about every situation, (apart from when she gets a fright). She doesn't pay much attention to 'Him', and is only there as a contrast and to close the loop by giving back the letter.

When you watch the 'real' version of events from her perspective, she doesn't make the same facial expressions or even move in the same way as we are shown when looking at the event from His viewpoint. We can see that he has an unreliable viewpoint. The best example of this being shown in the film is when 'She' looks 'Him' dead in the eye and drops the can of beans. I wanted this to feel like a threat, but a completely unsolicited one, to show that his anxiety is skewing the situation to make him feel that people are out to get him (when they aren't at all.)

In order to have this scene make sense from her side, I had to have something be happening in the background separate to either of them for her to be shocked by, and so the Flasher was born. I debated having a car or bicycle crash happen outside the window, but I didn't want her leaving the shop, and I didn't want an event that



needed loose ends tying up. The flasher character however is free to roam through this seaside town, shocking people as he pleases for no reason other than he likes to. He, like the postman, is living a separate and unrelated life to either of the main characters other than the one time they briefly come into contact.

The letter itself is the core aspect of this film. I grappled for a long time about whether or not to reveal the contents of the letter, but ultimately decided that it was better to leave it as an unknown element. I have no idea what the letter contains, and I think it's better that way as viewers can imagine the contents as whatever they want. I like that by not revealing the letter it keeps up the level of mystery and hopefully intrigue. I also like that it takes control away from the viewer and myself, because we won't get all the answers yet we expect to in films. As previously mentioned I love films that leave me wondering, and so I wanted to try and pay homage to all the films that have left me frustrated and wanting answers.

The entire time I have been making this film, I haven't been able to 'pin down' the genre. Every time I watch the film I perceive it differently depending on my mood. I think that this is because as previously mentioned I connected to my character emotionally while making him, and I know that the events in the film that scare him are an extension of his and my anxiety. Sometimes I get sucked in with him and watch it from His (quite stressful) perspective, sometimes I watch it from Her perspective of objectivity. Sometimes I watch it and I feel both at once. Because there is a lot happening in the story, and the mood is constantly changing from fear, to nonchalance, to being plain silly (the flasher sequence) it's very hard to pick out just one overarching tone or mood amongst the consistent inconsistency. Although maybe once I have had some space away from this project and I come back to it I will be able to give myself an answer by defining the genre.

This also begs the question of who this film is intended for, and yet again this is a question I am unsure about answering. To me this feels like a film that people might stumble upon. I think that those who have experience with anxiety may connect to it in the same way as I do, but I am not specifically putting it out there with that intention. That is more a side effect of my personality being incorporated into the storyline. I want people to enjoy the film and take away from it whatever they would like, in the same way that I have absorbed elements of films I love and have been influenced by them. My only hope is that for some people who watch my film, they will want to rewatch it at some point in time to answer questions. Although that is a slightly double edged sword as I don't want the film to not make any sense at all and therefore make rewatching a necessity. I have tried my best to not make this the case.

In some ways I wonder if I do set a genre for the film, if that will then affect how people expect to see and interpret it. For example if you go to see a film that has been advertised as a comedy, you go in with at least some expectation that you will laugh. The same goes for a horror film, you are going in with some expectation of being scared at some point during the film. Which begs the question, is setting a genre helpful or hindering for my film? If I had to pinpoint it down to an emotion I want this film to evoke, it would probably be curiosity. Does that make this film a mystery film? Ironically, I'm not sure. As previously stated, I want people to see this film and

come to their own conclusions about what happened and what the intentions were, and although this is definitely possible when a film is labelled with a genre, part of me worries that that label will make it less accessible and appealing to those that might enjoy this film if it was a complete unknown entity.

The sound has definitely added an element to the film I didn't expect and I love that. I had a lot of trouble getting a sound designer and had a few stressful experiences with the person I originally asked to score this film. I am extremely lucky to not be an only child, as at the last minute my sister stepped in and created the music for the film. I think that this enhances the story in a way I couldn't have predicted, and she complimented and matched the constantly changing feeling of the film beautifully. I am extremely proud of the music portion of the film, and very grateful to her. I especially love that she managed to incorporate some subtle Kate Bush notes. I left the score in her hands, and am delighted with the results.

The foley I added later on in Audition after the music was done, and although it works with the film I still feel like more can be done with the sound effects. I had to let go of obsessing over the foley in order to finish the rest of this project/assessment. (Again, poor time management that I will amend for future projects). But before the grad show I would like to go back over the foley and make some adjustments.

I debated over the title of this film until the very end of the making process, but I have called it 'The Postman' because the postman is the catalyst for all of the events in the film. He plays both the smallest and the biggest part, as his delivery of the dreaded letter sets off the chain reaction of the characters meeting. Although he's only shown twice in the film, the events of the story wouldn't be possible without him. What I love most about that is the thought that postmen in the real world are wreaking havoc daily without knowing.

There are a few things like that that make me laugh in this film, and it has been really nice to put something out that has moments I still smile at. I'm not sure if anyone else will find a flasher or the abrupt way 'He' falls through the door underwater funny, but it's nice to be able to feel a range of emotions in my own work. Perhaps part of the reason I can't decide on a tone or mood for the film is because I don't want to. I would like people to walk away from seeing this film with their own interpretation of the tone and mood. Somehow it feels wrong to dictate that, even as the filmmaker. With past projects I have been so wrapped up in the physical creation that I have lost any love for them, but this (although still not quite the way I want it to be) is a film I like, and that I am happy to put out.

I am proud of myself for finishing the film in the way I set out to, and for pushing through bad bouts of mental health and home life. I think that my mental health contributed hugely to the creation of the characters and events and I like that there are moments in the story that I can pinpoint back to how I was feeling on a certain day whilst drawing or colouring. It feels like a very personal project and it's refreshing to actually see that as a positive. The last two years have shown me that I am able to be disciplined within creating. When the pandemic struck I had serious self doubt, and for a while I thought that maybe I would not be able to finish the film. I

am very lucky and grateful to be able to animate from home, as without that I'm not sure what I would have done. I like that the film is, in essence, very strange. I am drawn to strange films so am happy to be putting one out into the world of animation. I am proud of myself for pushing through every bout of creative block and very happy to be handing in a 'completed' film.

The film is by no means perfect, due to the poor time management, there is plenty to tweak and I am aiming to spend the next few weeks leading up to the grad show making these changes in order to make it feel fully complete. A few parts of the animation (particularly the running sequences) I could not get right, and so I want to go back over those and dedicate a few days to making them better.

I have learned a lot in the making of this film and although there have been good and bad parts to all of this, I have thoroughly enjoyed the overall process. I feel very lucky to have been able to do a masters and to have been able to spend two years making a film freely before embracing the real world of studio jobs. Coming out of this process I see myself as more of a professional animator and filmmaker. There is plenty to fix and adjust in my animation techniques but I know that I will get better over time with perseverance.

The current climate of animation seems to be exciting, interesting, experimental and I hope it stays that way. Moreover I hope that there is a place for me amongst that. . At some point in the future I would love to work on a children's TV show, but for now I will take whatever form of work I can get in the industry. I currently have some upcoming commissions and am hopeful that I can make some sort of name for myself as an animator and storyteller after leaving ECA.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Looking to the future, I am applying to every animation studio I can find in Brighton; Buff Motion, Lolly Studio, Posh Gecko, Bliink, Move, Bigman, Cub, Box Studio. And some outside of Brighton; Sliced Bread Animation, The Line, Moth, Keyframe Studios, Studio AKA, Hocus Pocus Studio, Tinmouse, Fudge. I am going to keep searching for animation jobs and applying to anything and everything that comes my way.

I have a few commissions lined up for the future which I am looking forward to.

I uploaded a few videos up onto the app TikTok a few months ago, and my animation went viral. Because of this I was approached by a musician on the platform, who asked me to animate a music video for the official release of her song. I am very excited about this project and am going to continue uploading on to the platform in the hopes I can get some more commission work and also as a way to continue animating short videos as a creative exercise.

I am happy with my final film, but I know that I can improve it. Given the time constraints of the hand in I wasn't able to adjust it as much as I would have liked, but plan to spend the next few weeks leading up to the grad show making these adjustments. Once those are made I am going to look at and submit to film festivals in the hope that my film is accepted by some. This is also to try and get my name out into the animation sphere, and to possibly meet some other

animators if I get the chance. I am hoping that if I do get lucky enough to be accepted by any festivals, I could potentially meet someone, or several people to collaborate with on a project in future.

Originally I planned to have two projects done by the end of my postgraduate course, I wanted to make a short film and a pilot for a children's TV show. The pilot was going to be a project that I could use to pitch my undergraduate character 'Fisherman Dee' to online media companies such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and small studios. Although I had no expectations of it being taken up, it seemed like a good idea to put myself into a position where I had used the time the course gave me wisely. It also seemed like a good way to throw myself into the deep end and try my hand at making work that I would be actively pitching.

However, time constraints and the pandemic altered my plans ever so slightly and I did not make the pilot, but I did make the film. I still plan on making that pilot and a pitch bible, however now it will be made in my spare time. It is potentially a good chance to really experiment with those traditional animation techniques I decided not to use in the film such as cel animation and paint on glass. Either way it's nice to go forward past university with a few personal projects in mind.

In the long term, the goal is to be animating at a studio and one day I would love to open my own animation studio and make shows for children aged 10-14. I want to be able to provide consistent characters and worlds for kids to immerse themselves in. I feel like my future at this point in time is very open, and there's a lot of avenues I can go down. I plan to brush up on my after effects as well to maximise my employability.