



How to make a movie and survive

Outsiders

Production Diary



By
Hank Orion

This is my story of making a movie. Following are my notes I wrote while I was making Outsiders, my first film. I wanted to document it and post it on the Internet, I hope somebody will find it useful.

April 31, 2015

I'm starting this project late and I don't know how will it go and if will it be useful to anybody at all. The idea behind it all is to document my process of making a film. I'm sitting in a coffee shop, enjoying coffee as the hot Californian sun warms up my laptop. I've started working on a screenplay called Outsiders long time ago back in 2013 when I was living in London, England. During this time story itself changed drastically, what started almost as an alien invasion ended up as a psychological thriller of any kind. I wanted to write not just another movie, I wanted to tell a story of my fears. You see, for some reason I was always afraid of going camping. Being alone in the middle of nowhere and having no one out there if you need them scared the shit out of me, leave alone staying there over night. And I'm not talking about big bad bears hiding in the forest, I'm talking about that mystery in the air of not knowing who might be there with you. The tension, that makes you paranoid. I have no idea where I have those fears from. I camped only once when I was about fourteen, in my backyard. Yesterday, as of April 29, 2015 I finally finished the first draft that I actually like, although it's only sixty pages long I finally feel confident enough about shooting it. They say your screenplay got to be at least ninety pages long, I say will see. Now I realize why it took me so long to finish it. For all those years I tried to make it work, I wanted to combine the incompatible. I rewrote the same mistakes again and again, all over again. At some point of my life I gave up on this story and couldn't write anything at all for about six months. The key was to change the core, to make it alive. Why do we watch movies? Because we want to experience something we can't in real life. On January 10, 2015 I arrived to the U.S. with the false idea in my mind of making a movie here. I couldn't get a work visa so I got a student visa. For some reason it seemed easier for me to shoot it here in Los Angeles than in London. I thought I'll just show up with a script in my hand and money will flow to me. For Christs sake, it's Hollywood, right? Wrong. In reality Los Angeles is not like many see it, and it's not like I imagined it. I'm not saying it's a bad city, it's gorgeous city and I love it with all my heart to the point that just the idea of leaving it hurts me. I met amazing people here, talented people. It's not easy for an outsider to make it here, especially if you're new and don't know anybody. Like I was. I'm not talking about being new to the city of Los Angeles or any other city, I'm talking about being new to the U.S., on a visitor basis and when everything limits you as an artist. Where you can't even work to pay for your expenses. To say it's hard is to say nothing at all. Thanks God I had some savings in my bank account that kept me afloat. In my first month in LA I stayed in Los Feliz, beautiful area of Los Angeles. Thank you George if you're reading this. As time went by I met even more people, I fell in love with Los Angeles. Then I moved to the Hollywood. I remember living close to 101 Freeway close to Hollywood Blvd, it was noisy but cheap. Sometimes I couldn't sleep at night, so I wrote. I started working again on my screenplay. I remember my first night in Hollywood. I went for a walk down the Melrose

Ave and after a while my heart speeded up. I hit a wall, and behind that wall all the magic happened. I stood there and couldn't do nothing. All my life I wanted to get there and when I finally did it I was absolutely helpless. It was Paramount Pictures.

I was close to finish screenplay like never before, it was time to start looking for people who might be interested at my film. I sent endless amounts of query letters and treatments to various production houses and studios. I was begging. But it all was useless. I've heard stories that they never read unsolicited material. I guess it's true, because nobody replied back to me. Soon I run out of money. It was time to do something. For the first time in my life I was scared, I was scared that I might never make it anymore. They say Los Angeles is a city of angels, true. What they don't tell you is that Los Angeles is also full of those who couldn't make it. I call them fallen angels. It's sad going around the city and see all those people struggling, trying to become somebody, but believing in themselves and not giving up. I know some actors who are amazing performers, but don't even have enough money to buy food. The truth is that being in Hollywood isn't enough anymore, times have changed. It's a big bad world full of turns and twists and life tends to just put you in the middle of everything and then just throw you on the side. Next. I'm going to London at the end of May.

May 2, 2015

Although the screenplay is finished there are still some moments that I'd like to improve. Like dialogue, for example. Today I've made minor adjustments. But more work needs to be done. I can write a screenplay in a couple of hours, for some reason it's very natural and easy for me. What takes time that is a dialogue.

May 6, 2015

I started writing a second draft. So far looking good. Seventy four pages. I know I can do it.

May 22, 2015

I launched casting call for Outsiders today. It's official now. Now let's wait and see what happens next.

May 25, 2015

I can't believe how fast time goes. This morning I went to Venice with two friends of mine, Kate and Julia. We rode bikes from Santa Monica pier to Venice and back, it was cool. If you're reading this, thanks guys. Anyways, back to the story. Instead of writing the second draft I started all over and finished a brand new first draft of a completely new story. It's similar to the original idea, but it is much easier to make in terms of production. I left original name, Outsiders, which I believe suits perfectly this story even more. It has just two characters, set in a forest. The challenge is to make it original, make it unique in some way. As of today, it's only sixty one page long, yes, I know it's kind of short but I'll write a second draft soon and extend it, make it better, alive. I have some ideas in my mind that need to be elaborated further. And that takes time too. As of now I just outlined key scenes, the ones that I think are important for the movie. I'd better hurry, time goes so fast and sometimes I tend to just let it

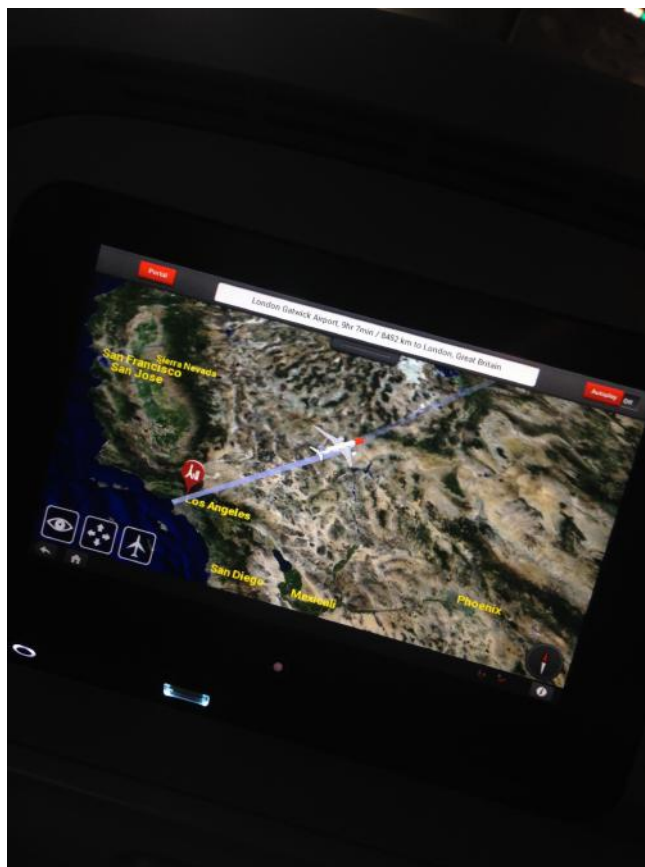
go. Not this time. This time I got it. I have to.

May 26, 2015

I realized today that I probably won't be able to get money to shoot it, so I worked out a plan. It's always good to have a back-up plan. If I won't be able to find funding for my film, I will shoot it with all natural light and with what I have. In three or two days. It can be done, it was done before. I still have to pay my actors and crew, but now it's only two of them and one sound mixer, I can afford it. I hope so. I don't care what all those people say about filmmaking as a team, I don't have a team, I cannot afford a team, and I don't need a team. I've been shooting out there for a while now and know how it works. Yes, it's great to have a team that does their part and contributes to the story, but it can be done without it. Yes, it's much more stressful, but hey, so is life. For the past five years I've been in shit tons of stress, it's not something I have to get used to. I made many mistakes. The other question that still stays open is that how will I get cast and crew to and from location every day. Although I can pay my little team I can't afford extra expenses such a hotel and transportation even for three days. That's a lot of money for me. Maybe I should cast local actors? Will see.

May 27, 2015

There is no going back at this point. This log is a little off the main theme. I'm writing this somewhere above Nevada at the altitude of 37,000 feet. In nine hours I'll be in London. I have this feeling in my gut that this might be the worst thing I've done so far. And I'm not talking just about the decision to go to England and shoot my movie there, there is something else. I met a girl. I wasn't looking for it, it wasn't on the make. It was a perfect storm. She said one thing, I said another. The next thing I knew is that I want to spend the rest of my life in the middle of that conversation. Not my words, but I love them. And now sitting here I ask myself: What the fuck are you doing man? Get off that plane. I don't know what's going to happen now. Between us. In nine hours I'll be five and a half thousand miles away from her. And that scares the shit out of me. Now looking back, I'm sure I could have found another way to make it work, back in Los Angeles, without leaving. It's too late now I guess, I have to face my demons now. Was it worth it? I don't know. Time will tell.



Flying to London, England from Los Angeles, U.S

May 29, 2015
London. Cold. Rainy.
Windy. Well, like always.

I'm sitting at the Starbucks near Tower Bridge, my favorite place back few years ago and everything is different at this point. The city I fell in love with before is not mine anymore. It's strange, serene. Everywhere I look everything looks so familiar around me, and yet at the same time strange. I can't believe I lived here for four years.

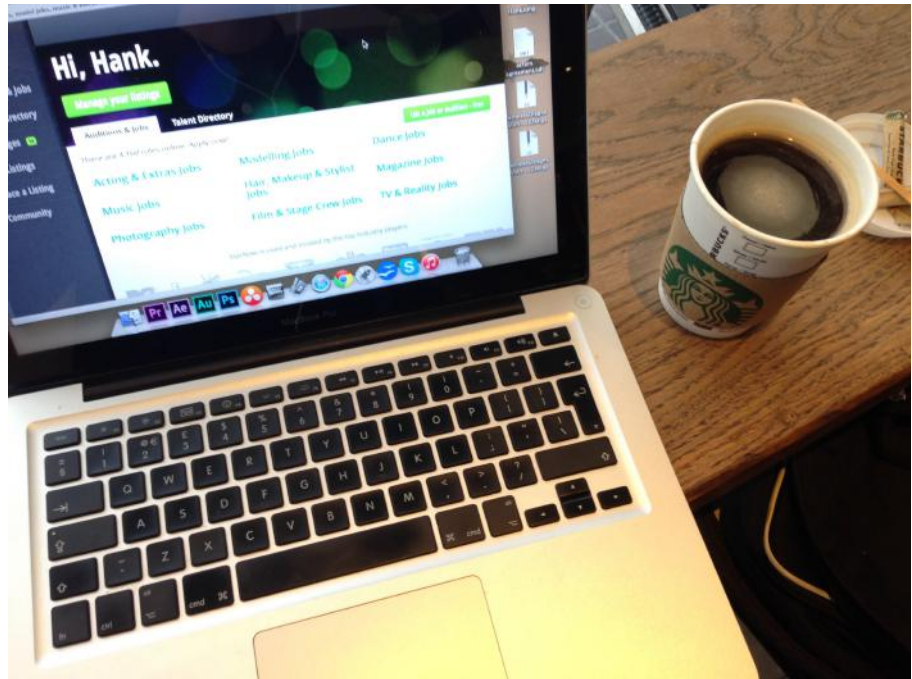


London, England

It's not bad, it's just, not mine. Do I regret now that I left L.A.? Yes, I do, a lot. I can't wait to come back one day. I'm out of money, I need to find a job here to support myself while I'll be making this movie. I'm staying at my friend's house for a couple of days, but I still need to find a place to leave. Thank you Pavel and Tonia, you guys are my favorite. And I'll never forget you, wherever this life will take me. Damn, so much is on top of my head now. The plan is to cast by the end of June, lock actors and rehearse by the end of July and shoot in the beginning of August. With no money and limited time on my side, I'll have to shoot with a very low shooting ratio, like 1:1. This means it's got to be rehearsed a lot. One other reason is that I'll be shooting with no permits whatsoever, meaning run n' gun. And that means ever more stress. So far I've decided to shoot ProRes instead of the RAW. Not only because of the hard drive space but also because I know that I'll be editing it and that my old MacBook won't cut RAW, I've tried. The camera I'll be using is Blackmagic. And unless Blackmagic comes up with a new super firmware update, what they sometimes do, I'll have to shoot ProRes. But I don't know yet. Now I'm considering an option of not hiring a sound guy, but instead just tape the damn microphone to the camera and shoot the damn thing. I can't afford to spend money. I spent the last night awake, thinking. I'm going back to Los Angeles in October and need every penny. And I guess I'll have to stop with Starbucks for a while. Poor artist. Damn. On the other hand, I need a make up artist. Can't compromise it. Movie heavily relies on the special effects that kick off starting from the act II. I have no idea what to do, where to look for one? But I have a good feeling about it. That's all I need now. For years I've been fighting with myself, now I've found a key to my inner self.

May 30, 2015

I have more than a hundred applications for just two roles available. Most of them are so cold “fake” actors, who just like to apply, that's all. Some of them are real actors, at least I hope they are. I've looked through the applications and I like what I see. The scariest part for me is that when I will tell them how low I can pay them, will they still be interested? I don't know. I need to have a solid selection by the mid June. There is no time to waste. I have to tell them now. I've also gone through expenses I need. It will be hard. With all the props I need. Maybe even the hardest period of my life. I'll have to work full time to pay my living, make this film and save some money to return to the US, cast actors, plan shooting, location scout, and then actually shoot it. Sometimes I think money is just an excuse not to do something. If you don't have money doesn't mean you can't do it. Also, I want to edit it in Los Angeles. I love that city. People who live there don't appreciate it, they don't appreciate what they already have. I'm scared. At this stage my life is about to change in either good way or a bad way.



Production office for the next month is my local Starbucks

June 1, 2015

Time flies, fast. As of today I have over a hundred and seventy applications. I'm impressed. Originally I interested to pay my cast, but now I realize I don't have money to pay them. So I send tons of email out asking if they could work for a credit. And to my surprise, more than forty of them agreed to come to the audition. Experience tells me that half of them will actually show up, but hey, I need just two actors. Auditions are coming in about a week or so. I think it's very important to keep their interest in my project, keep the fire burning. Then, hopefully after auditions I'll have a better idea of what I might actually pull out and make some changes to the screenplay. I want to go to the Epping Forest, a beautiful location not that far away from London. It's a potential filming location. I don't know yet. And the best part is that I can take a train to get there, how cool is that? But I'm not sure if I can find a river. And river scene is very important in this film. I guess I'll have to wait and find out.

June 5, 2015

Auditions confirmed. I've found the cheapest room I could get and booked it for hearings. I haven't even seen it, who cares if it's has two chairs and a table, that's all I need. So, June 20, 2015 - auditions date. It's coming closer and closer, and that scares me. I imagine sitting there in front of all those people, I think I'll be more nervous than them. They are actors, they are used to go to the auditions every day, even a few times a day sometimes. But I have a good feeling about it. The most important thing is to be professional and be yourself. Try to answer the questions and pretend you know what you're doing. Easy. Piece of cake. I did few auditions before for friend's short films, it shouldn't be that different other than much more questions. Now I have to send the sides to the actors. In a meantime I want to go location scouting, I hate losing time. I work full time now to save as much as I can, I get home around 2AM now and wake up around 7AM because at 4PM I have another shift at work. I have to do as much as I can during this time. That's if I'm lucky. If I'm doing a double shift, it's 9AM to 1AM. Which leaves me no time for sleep whatsoever. Some say sleep is a sign of weakness.

June 20, 2015

The day that I've been waiting for so long let me down. Yesterday night I sent an email to the studio where I booked a room for the casting, to get a reply saying that they have no my reservation in their system. And with eighty actors waiting outside I have no other option but to cancel and apologize. It's my fault, I tried to save. I'm moving casting date, and I don't know to when.

July 17, 2015

It seems like just yesterday I was sitting in sunny coffee shop in Los Feliz and today I'm sitting in rainy London, looking out of the window and asking myself what have I done so far related to my film. And I realized not much. I started fund-raising campaign, but canceled it because no one wanted to donate money. I started casting call and received around eighty good applications, but haven't selected actors yet. To say the least auditions were a complete disaster. So far I made some notes in my notebook, I wrote characters' backgrounds. I still have to find locations where to shoot, I have to lock actors, I have to organize rehearsals, I have to do camera tests and I have just a little over a month before principal photography starts. I remember when I started writing this article I mentioned, I'm moving back to London and I will stay here. I've changed my mind. Being a filmmaker, I'm looking for a support, and I'm not talking about money, but support as it is in its original meaning. And unfortunately England just doesn't care about its film industry. What a shame. Until something changes here that's not the place where I want to be. I'm going back to Los Angeles. Looking at the script and realizing it's only just over eighty pages long makes me wonder if it's enough. I've heard people saying you need at least ninety page script. I say will see.

July 23, 2015

Here we go again. Eventually I had to start all over. Auditions were a disaster. I relaunched a casting call again a few days ago and already have few solid actors interested in my script. I learned my lesson, I made mistakes. At this stage I'm confident enough about this project. I still have to make them sign the contract, but once they read the script and if they like it, and I hope they will, I can start with the next stage. At the same time I have to location scout, all I do is to talk about location scouting, but never have time to do it. The other day, for example, I took a train and went all the way to the other side of the city where I had to take a bus that would take me to the forest. When I arrived, I realized that the last bus already gone. It's only me to blame, I went who knows where without planning it in advance, on Sunday, in Europe. Hopefully tomorrow I'll get there and take some pictures to have an idea if it's usable or not. The hardest location to find is a river, there are just not many of them except Thames river. It's London. Will see how it goes.

August 5, 2015

So far so good. I've casted both roles Nicole and Josh, signed agreements and I'm getting ready to shoot. Their names are Sophia and Jasper. And they are amazing. Looks like I'm moving the right way so far. It's been quite a challenge on its own, and I hope I've casted the right actors. Something tells me I did. They have this energy to themselves. Well, there is only one way to find out now. I have a good feeling about it. I couldn't pay them for their work so I offered them three percent of the revenue, if there will be any. At the end of the week we're having the first production meeting where I will introduce everybody. After that rehearsals and then shoot. Oh, and I found a sound mixer, his name is Diogo. We work together. And the guy seems like he knows his stuff. I have to talk to him.

August 15, 2015

We had first rehearsal and it was absolutely fantastic. Now I'm sure I chose the right actors. We went through the script and ideas, endless questions and answers. We also agreed and set up more rehearsals. Once every week, at the end of each week, and one right before the shoot.

August 17, 2015

I've found an amazing makeup artist. Her name is Kimberley. And she's a magician. I love her work.

August 19, 2015

I keep looking for locations even though it's only ten days before the shoot. Today I visited Epping Forest, Leytonstone and Blackpark and I think I know where I will be shooting now.



Me at Blackpark Forest

It looks so good, and the best part is that there is nobody around for miles. The problem is that locations are fifty miles away from each other. Now I have to do shooting schedule and make sure it works.



Blackpark Forest



Epping Forest



Epping Forest



Leytonstone Lake

August 22, 2015

I did a shooting schedule. And since the locations are so far from each other we won't be shooting in chronological order, but instead by locations. One day for forest scenes, half day for camp and half day for lake scenes. There will also be one whole day in the city for flashbacks only. So no audio needed there. I spoke with my sound guy today, and my heart tells me he is not interested. Even if he says he is very interested and wants to help. I'm going to the store to get the tape.

August 27, 2015

Today I went to the store and bought some props. I got two backpacks and filled them newspapers to make them look heavier. Also, I imagined main character wearing hat, so I went and bought two Panama hats. I also got some rope, two metal bottles, little ax, tarp, and a ring. I knew exactly what I need and I got everything on my list.



Bags full of newspapers

August 30, 2015

Last rehearsal went great. I think they are ready for the shoot. I'm ready.

And even if there are some open questions I'm sure we can handle them and overcome them while we shoot. In two days I'll be in the middle of nowhere shooting a movie. I haven't heard from Diogo, I guess he's out. It's time to tape that mic to the camera and get it done. I wasn't joking. I always have a backup plan.



Coffee and some storyboarding.



BMCC

Camera is ready to roll. Let's do it.

September 1, 2015

Day 1 of Outsiders. Sophia's brother Sebastian came to help us with filming. Thank you very much Sebastian. We filmed lake scenes and camp scenes at Leytonstone. It's a lake in East London. Noisy, but beautiful.



Busy road next to the lake.

Because our make up artist could only be there for one day we had to get it all. So we shot all the scenes that require makeup at the lake first.



Jasper and Kimberley

I planned so everything is around the corner. I rented two boats for one hour and hoped it will

be enough.



Me and Jasper

It was great. I was afraid somebody will stop us or ask for permission but nobody cared. And we kept it quiet and tried to attract as little attention as we could. It was only me, Sebastian, Kimberley, Sophia and Jasper.



Jasper and Kimberley

One of the scenes at the lake required her to get out of the lake and on the shore where she cut her leg and pulls a piece of glass out. That meant she had to get inside first. And since it's England in September water was freezing cold. She did it. Thank you Sophia.



Me and Sophia



Sophia

I couldn't afford to lose any extra money whatsoever, so me and Sebastian returning boats on time to avoid late return fee.



Me and Sebastian



Me and Sophia, Sebastian, Jasper (in order)

We needed two boats, one for actors and one for me to film from. I had forty minutes to get the shots on the boat, and I got them.

We also got camp scenes. Time was flying so we had to be quick.



Me and Jasper

And before it got too dark we drove eleven miles to Epping Forest and got forest makeup shots. I will hope it will match with other locations.



Me and Sophia, on the train to London.

We filmed twenty seven scenes. And that was a wrap for day one!

September 2, 2015

Today we're shooting in Blackpark forest. It's completely opposite side of the city. That's that forest where they shot Harry Potter. And it looks amazing. We filmed all the chase scenes and matching scenes to interact between lake. It wasn't easy. But we did it. That was wrapped for day two. We filmed thirty seven scenes on the second day. Tomorrow we have flashbacks scenes to film and that's it.



Blackpark Forest.

I'll get home later tonight and copy all the files.



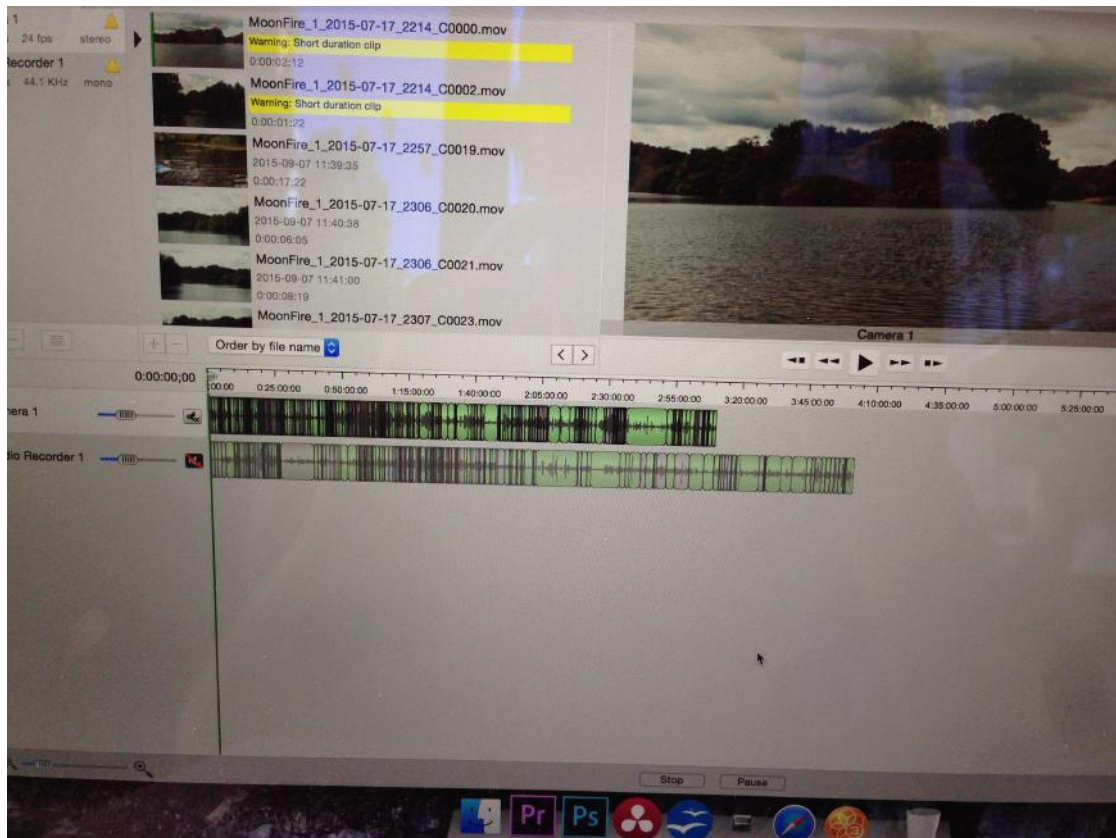
Copying files.

September 3, 2015

We went all around London and filmed flashbacks. I had camera handheld not to attract extra attention and I got what I needed. That's a wrap. I just filmed a feature film in two and a half days. I went to coffee shop and got myself a nice cup of coffee. Next is the edit, but I'll take my time here and edit in Los Angeles.

September 4, 2015

Today I synced all the video files and sound.



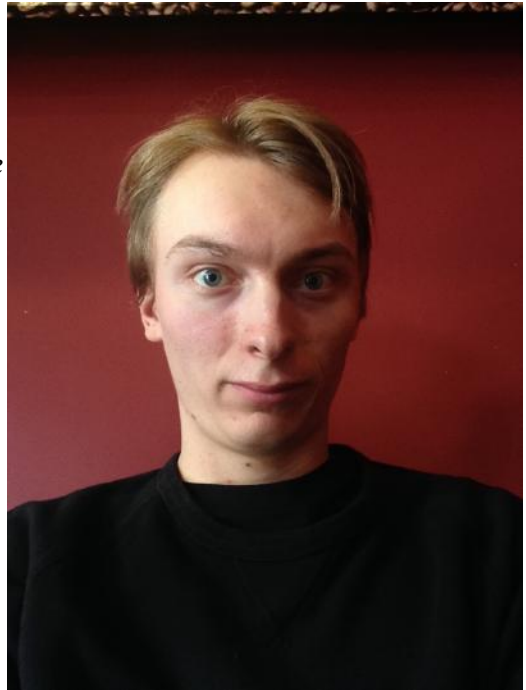
Syncing files.

I'm very happy with camera coverage. I got about three hours of video footage and four hours of audio. The problem is I don't know what I'll do with audio, it's bad. It's noisy. But I'm sure I can fix it somehow. It's time to put it all on the hard drive. I have 3TB total of files. And, I survived it. I'll edit it in Los Angeles.

September 24, 2015

I arrived back to Los Angeles. I opened NLE software and loaded files. I don't know what to do now, files are missing. I have one hour and ten minutes of video on my timeline. Where's another two hours? I checked everywhere, and I couldn't find it, or recover it. I shot a film and I can't finish it now. I should have made more copies.

That's the story of my film. Above are my notes I made while I was working on this film. It's just a small portion of what I had to deal with. There were bad days and good days. And even if I did not succeed this time I will next time. Because I won't give up. I had to make a decision, and at the end, I decided to edit what I have and make a short film. When everyone told me you can't do it, I went across the Atlantic to shoot it. Believe in yourself, listen to your heart.



Hank Orion