

Bucknell University

Bucknell Digital Commons

Honors Theses

Student Theses

Spring 2023

Last Week I Had A Dream That Everything Went According To Plan

Nabeel Jan

Bucknell University, nrj005@bucknell.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/honors_theses

Recommended Citation

Jan, Nabeel, "Last Week I Had A Dream That Everything Went According To Plan" (2023). *Honors Theses*. 662.

https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/honors_theses/662

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Bucknell Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Bucknell Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcadmin@bucknell.edu.

Last Week I Had This Dream That Everything Went According to Plan

By Nabeel Jan

Advisor: Rebecca Meyers

Second Reader: Bastian Heinsohn

Honors Representative: Roger Rothman

Submitted to the Honors Council for Honors in Film and Media Studies

3 April 2023

Table of Contents:

- I. Introduction
- II. Inspiration
- III. Past Work
- IV. Project Goals
- V. Pre-Production
- VI. Principal Photography
- VII. Post-Production
- VIII. Reflection
- IX. Conclusion
- X. Reading and Viewing List

I. Introduction

When I was young, maybe ten or twelve, someone in my family made a mistake. We were all at a family gathering— it might have been a wedding or an Eid party— and an uncle could sense I was bored out of my mind. I was sitting in the corner, waiting for my parents to take me home and let me play outside, when he came over and handed me his camera. It was a Nikon DSLR, nothing fancy, but still much too expensive and heavy for a 5th grader to be left alone with. Crouching to my level, he showed me how to focus and zoom the lens, how to click the shutter, and how to see the picture I just took, and then he gave me the camera and walked away. This was the beginning of the end— I took photos for the entire day, one after another until my mom had to claw the thing away from me. The next time I was over at their house, he offered again and we followed the same routine: a quick reminder of the controls and then free rein— again and again for years. This is the exact moment I remember getting the bug: the need to capture moments inside a frame. It began as still images, but these glimpses of life soon gave way to backyard music videos, documentaries about who was the fastest runner in our neighborhood, and a spy movie trailer hastily edited on iMovie to convince my parents to let our cousins sleepover (it didn't work).

Now, twelve years later, I can't stop. For the past four years, I have focused on honing my storytelling ability, culminating in my honors thesis: a short film entitled *Last Week I Had This Dream That Everything Went According to Plan*, that blends my personal questions of racial assimilation with a murder mystery. The story is centered around Samir, a young first-generation American who, on the surface, is going to meet his girlfriend's (Sarah) friends for the first time. As the story continues, the friends (Emma, Andy, Nina, and Simone) discover Sarah has been murdered, and soon uncover Samir's true identity. This project has been a taxing one for me: I wrote the film over the summer, produced it over the fall, directed a crew of nine to shoot it, and have undertaken editing the entire project on my own.

This written element aims to reflect on the learning experiences within the process (pre-production, principal photography, and post-production) while also discussing my goals for the piece, inspiration in creating it, and journey to where I am today.

II. Inspiration

I first decided to make this film during the Summer of 2022. College and senior year specifically are unique times that condense a lot of emotions and change in a short amount of time. I wanted to use the vehicle of a fun, engaging story, to portray something I and others I know have always dreaded— a post-college world where “the dream” didn’t work out and we’re resigned to a life of mediocrity in a job that is easy but not rewarding. As a First-Generation American, the pressure of success and furthering the path that my parents’ blazed for me has always loomed large in my decision-making. In June, I was wrapping up LSAT prep and simultaneously working on film projects to round out what was my final summer vacation. This was a hurricane of emotions: the question of what I wanted to be when I grew up was no longer a distant idea and was an impending reality, the choices that I made felt a lot larger than they did when I made them, and I felt I had painted myself into a corner. This all came to a head the day before my LSAT. I sat in my car in a parking lot staring out of my sunroof thinking about all the small decisions I made that brought me to that exact moment. I wrote this down:

when I was little I wanted to be a lawyer.

I wanted to help the good guys get the bad guys.

but then I got older, and I realized the good guys weren’t that good, and the bad guys didn’t grow up wanting to be the bad guys.

so I stopped dreaming of that— I started doing what was easy and then I woke up and all of a sudden my life wasn’t a question of what I could do, but what could’ve been.

That is what this film aims to extrapolate from. I ask the question: what happens when someone gives up on what they love and goes in a different direction, and all of a sudden one day they look up and their life has already played out? This fear came from a personal question of what my post-graduate plans were: would I give up filmmaking for law school and always have a “what if” hanging over me? In this film, Samir has a world of potential in the back of his head, he isn’t sure what might have happened if he followed his passion and now it’s too late for him to turn back.

Beyond this, the tangible filmmaking inspiration behind this piece falls in two key areas: visual style and written content. Beginning with visual style, I am incredibly influenced by theatre. As a director who works within both forms, I see the value of a good wide shot, and how long-duration shots and extended takes can allow for an enhanced performance to emerge for the actor. This can also be seen in the filmmakers I admire. Namely, the tools of Wong Kar-Wai (*Chungking Express*), Yasujiro Ozu (*Good Morning*), Andrei Tarkovsky (*The Mirror*), and Jean-Luc Godard (*Prenom Carmen*) are elements I credit with creating the way with which I interact with the camera. Ozu's "Tatami Shot" directly influenced how I shot scenes where Samir was sitting at a lower level than the rest of the ensemble. Intentionally placing him on a lower plane allowed me to communicate a status gap between him and the group, but also dictate a cultural difference between him and the rest of the group. Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* is another one of my favorite films of all time. The slow, painting-like cinematography demonstrates how to ooze suspense and tension while maintaining audience interest. I decided to employ a similar strategy in beginning to hint that there was something wrong in the basement. By lingering on shots for a little too long and by extending sequences, Tarkovsky begins to seed doubt and confusion in the viewer's mind. This technique is one I implemented as early as my storyboarding phase. Lastly, Godard's stylistic approach to allowing the camera to react to elements of the plot and dialogue was paramount to how I incorporated POV and tripod lift shots into the film. There are two sequences where the camera tracks from a medium shot into an over-the-shoulder shot when confrontation is introduced. This was a direct homage to the opening of Godard's "Vivre Sa Vie" where the camera is an active participant in the conversation and tracks to cover the conversation.

Early on in the process, my collaborators and I decided that there would be no "Steadicam" or gimbal-mounted shots in the piece. Although this would traditionally be a part of a horror/slasher film, we decided the unflinching nature of tripods, shoulder-mounted setups, and rails would allow us to create rigidity within the frame that mirrored Samir's inability to break free of societal structures. This dictated how we storyboarded and found shot decks for the film. We pulled inspiration from contemporary films that subvert the horror genre effectively, including *Hereditary* (Ari Aster), *Barbarian* (Zach Creggar), *Bodies Bodies Bodies* (Halina Reijn). These pieces specifically, were chosen because they thematically match what I was attempting to do

with *Last Week I Had A Dream That Everything Went According to Plan*— they use the guise of a horror story to tell a much more emotionally potent story. Reflecting on inspiration for the script and plot devices of the film, far and away the most credit is due to The Daniels' *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*. It is not often you watch a movie once and come away wanting to see it again— it is even rarer to experience that feeling three more times. This film did that for me. It took the story of the Asian-American experience, specifically the divide between generations, and put it in a multiversal science fiction film. It continues to inspire me and exists as a perfect representation of what it means to subvert genre to tell a meaningful story. More credit lies with Edgar Wright's "Cornetto Trilogy," specifically, *The World's End*, as well as Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*. Each of these films packs truly profound stories that would otherwise not be seen by a wider audience into a fun outer layer. Specifically, *The World's End* tells a unique tale of a middle-aged man fighting alcoholism and the end of his youth within the vessel of an apocalypse/sci-fi film; it first reveals the cracks in his coping mechanisms as comedic beats during the battles, before elevating them to their real, drastic levels at the end. This was a strategy I wanted to employ with my film. Samir is not a stone-cold assassin or a smooth James Bond-esque character. He's simply someone who can do what needs to be done to accomplish a job.

III. Past Work

In looking back on my body of work that has emerged over the past four years, the thematic through-lines of growth, purpose, and adulthood stand out. At the end of my high school career, I attempted to undertake a similar project (although on a much smaller scale). Entitled *Firsts*, it is an anthology of short films that examines four "first times" for young adults as they navigated their first steps of real life. The shorts examine a person's first loss, first party, first fight, and first heartbreak. Looking back on this project, I had no idea what I was doing. I knew the story I wanted to tell, but had no real training with a camera or lights, and had a very basic understanding of Final Cut Pro. This forced me to learn on the go—I co-wrote all four pieces, which taught me how to adapt a script from my mind's eye to something an actor can work on. Moreover, I began to develop a directing style, communicating with friends I coaxed into acting for me to extract a performance without compromising our relationship. Most importantly, I also developed a common language and working style with my DP, Ian, who I have worked with in

multiple professional film settings since and continue to bring onto projects as a trusted collaborator and creative.

This led to my first classes at Bucknell where I studied how to use a camera and understand the film theory behind my favorite films. Although it was not my first project, *Growing Up* (the final film I made for an Advanced Sound Production Class), is a piece I value to this day. In the project, I interviewed roughly 10 of my friends about what they (as children) wanted to be when they grew up. After speaking for a while and establishing trust, I asked what they wanted to be now, and what had changed. This illuminated some incredible answers— some had a specific experience that closed the door on their dream, some drifted away, and some couldn't even remember. I found this fascinating and revisited the project this summer (two years later) and published it alongside found footage from my childhood. This project resonated particularly strongly with my peers. The responses I got from interviewees and those that know them were incredible and I immediately knew a film exploring similar premises would be successful for my age group.

This past summer, I was able to join a project with a University of Michigan film student, whose debut feature (still in post-production but tentatively entitled *I've Been Going Through Something*) examines similar ideas. As an Action Designer and Gaffer, I helped apply these abstract ideas to concrete film techniques. For example, I was able to imbue one sequence of poolside stunt choreography with the frustration of being treated like a child. The sequence comes at the climax of the film when the two main characters fight— releasing all their anger toward one another. Working with my stunt choreographer, I was able to design movement that allowed the power dynamics of the fight to resemble boyhood, manhood, and the transition between them while also working with the camera team to effectively translate it onto the screen.

My work in theatre has also reflected these motifs. As a junior, I was offered an Assistant Directorship while simultaneously directing Cocktail Theatre for Bucknell Theatre and Dance. My first show, *Appropriate*, written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and directed by Professor Anjalee Deshpande Hutchinson, centers around a white southern family as they grapple with the legacy of their now-deceased patriarch. The siblings are forced to grow up in the wake of this

death and deal with the remains of the estate and their complicated relationships with each other. I credit this production with teaching me how to work with actors. Professor Hutchinson is what I aim to be when leading a room full of artists— her ability to create excellent artistic work while caring for the team she is working with is something I aspire to achieve, and her mentorship is something I will never stop working to live up to. This was something I brought onto my own set-- caring for my fellow artists as humans first was a large priority for me, especially to ensure I didn't burn cast/crew members out during our one-week sprint of a shoot.

Directing *Kodachrome* was one of the most formative experiences of my creative career. It was a five-month process, beginning in May of 2022. Since the creative team was essentially me and whoever I could convince to help, I began conceptualizing over the summer, creating ground plans, doing script analysis, and doing everything I could before I was physically back on campus for the fall. This production taught me how to work hard and juggle all the pieces of a complex artistic endeavor. In learning time management, I also learned how to prioritize certain elements of the craft and learn when it is time to lose something. While editing this film, many exchanges that I loved during pre-production or even during filming did not make it into the final cut. To eliminate sequences that dragged, I had to forget how much I loved ideas when they first arose. Giving up on original ideas that I came into the process with is one of my least favorite feelings, but one that has served me well as I finish editing my film. Specifically, in this film, I had written a tenuous relationship between Andy and Emma. Although we can see cracks in their love, I decided to remove many exchanges that showed how deep the mistrust was-- going so far as to remove an entire walking sequence during production to accommodate both what was best for the story, and what worked best with the geography of the house.

Last, my most recent Assistant Directorship on *Lost Girl*, with Casey Venema (toss in her alumni year) was incredible. Her unflinching vision and ability to communicate precisely are elements I would like to bring to my productions. My work here also gave me the confidence to apply for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Stage Director and Choreographer's fellowship, which I was fortunate enough to win and will be furthering this April.

IV. Project Goals

This was by far the most complex production I have ever undertaken. I knew I had to be specific about what roles I took on myself and what I delegated, specifically given the rigor expected of honors theses. I decided to co-produce with a collaborator I had worked with over the summer and be the sole writer, director, and editor. I made this choice because of the saying “every time a film is made, three films are actually created— the one the writer wrote, the one the director shot, and the one the editor allows audiences to see.” I wanted to be in complete control.

My first goal was to effectively subvert genre within this film. As I proposed in the fall, this project was conceived to be something greater than a murder mystery. Subverting genre is a tricky line to walk, but one that creates a more nuanced story. Rian Johnson, the director of the *Knives Out* films, has repeatedly said that nobody truly cares about solving the crime in a whodunnit. The real story-- the one the audience came to see, is the one of human struggle that caused the problem and exacerbates the aftermath. In learning how to do this, I read texts that examined how masters of cinema have subverted genre. I primarily studied Alfred Hitchcock, whose subversion of genre entirely changed cinema. By harnessing horror to discuss prevalent societal issues, he paved the way for directors such as Robert Altman, the Daniels, and Ari Aster.

My second goal was to create a technically proficient film. What this meant from a director’s standpoint, was to set specific parameters for what the film should look and feel like, and then execute it. My creative team and I found references for the “vibe” of the film and then went about finding ways to put those into action. It also meant that I needed to work to create both a functional and respectful set to achieve my goals. Having the liberty to choose my crew helped tremendously. I pulled from past projects and current collaborators and was able to hire two assistant directors, a director of photography, a camera operator, two gaffers, a grip, a sound recordist, and a production assistant. The working relationship between all of these people, as well as, the five actors was incredible. Also, having a crew who are specialists in their roles working on my set rather than friends meant they knew why they were there and could execute the role perfectly.

As a producer, my work primarily meant I needed to make sure I was on track, had a location, and most importantly had a workable budget. Out of these three, the last was by far the most challenging. I applied to five grants in total and received four. Each came with its own restrictions and total amount, so creating and balancing each was a challenge, but one that taught me how to run a nimble operation. Anything that we could get for free or build with cheap resources was created at a low cost. My personal favorite example of this was shooting entire night-time scenes with black garbage bags over windows and sound blankets over the doors. With the film now completed, my final budget ran to \$3,500, a number that was effective in creating my final product and one that I am incredibly proud to have reached.

V. Pre-Production

Pre-production began in the Summer of 2022. The first draft of this screenplay came in at around 30 pages with a plot very dissimilar to what was shot in the Winter-- I understood it to be a murder mystery where the killer was also the protagonist, but I could not put my finger on what the center of it was. As my co-producer, Jason Fine put it to me, I had the structure, I just didn't know why we should care about Samir. Taking inspiration from Christopher Nolan and Rian Johnson's writing processes, I created a plot structure, split it into three "acts" for the intent of understanding my pacing, and then decided where I needed additional scenes and where others could be taken out. I decided I was way too front-heavy, there were too many sequences where the characters were just milling about and neither they nor the audience knew of the body in the basement, so I added a shot within an outdoor sequence where I began to hint to the audience that this was more than a romantic comedy. I also wanted to play with an opening that told the audience at the top of the film that Samir would end up in danger so that they would begin to judge all the characters as the film developed.

On this note, I knew I wanted something with a blanket of security that was immediately undermined-- I coined the tone I was looking for as "an L.L. Bean commercial where someone is murdered". As we built a general shot deck, we included references to actual LL Bean ads, Taylor Swift's "All Too Well" (10-Minute Version) music video, Rian Johnson's *Knives Out*, and Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*. As the fall progressed, I started focusing more on my producer role. Writing grant applications and hiring a crew was my next task while Jason scoured the area

for locations that I could begin to scout. I simultaneously began casting, calling specific actors I knew would be able to perform in specific roles, and sending out a broad casting call for the role of Samir. For four of the five characters, this was a relatively easy process-- one of the first two or three actors I auditioned nailed the part and I offered them the role. The trickiest role to cast was Samir. Knowing I was going for an actor of South Asian descent, I sent a casting call nationwide through communities my family and I knew of. I received responses from 20+ applicants and I ended up screen-testing five. With my cast and crew set, I began receiving responses from grants and finalizing my script. After feedback from Professors and friends, I headed toward a massive rewrite and ended with a 33-page shooting script.

This put me at Winter Break-- with my finances locked, I began ordering any supplemental equipment we would need, constructing call sheets and schedules with my AD team, looking at prospective weather forecasts and designing lighting and camera setups with my DP and Camera team. As I went to finalize payment with our Location, the owner of the cabin suddenly pulled out when I asked him to sign a standard location release, and I spent a stress-filled week finding an alternative home to shoot at. Luckily it worked out, the release was signed, and we had somewhere to shoot.

Reflecting on pre-production, this was part of the process that taught me the most about filmmaking. It was easily the most important piece of the process as my work in this stage allowed me to be successful later on. Planning out how a day would operate, shot listing, camera testing, and team meetings would all become essential as time began to evaporate and principal photography started. We needed to have everything that we could do beforehand so that when the fog of the shoot came around, we would be able to be as effective as possible.

Examples Pulled, Shotlists, Schedules, and Call Sheets Prepared During Pre-Production:



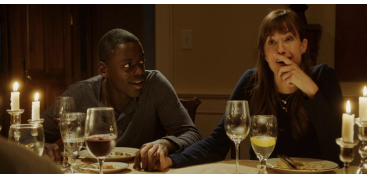
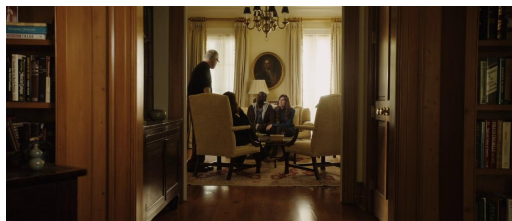
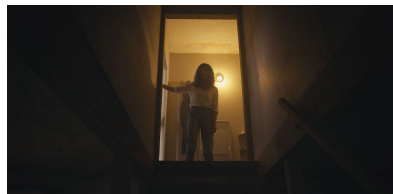
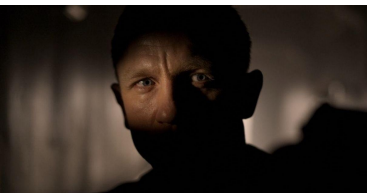
VISUAL STYLE: The Camera (2)

- Rian Johnson talks a lot about blocking the actors so they make a V coming towards the camera helping direct our eyes to this outsider. Let's save those shots for when we NEED them. Maybe when Samir is outed and Simone first arrives.



VISUAL STYLE: Costuming (2)

- EMMA/ANDY:
- Polar Opposite Dressing
 - Emma is granola
 - Andy is old money, tech bro
 - As they get more panicked, the facade comes down... Andy loses his cool and his preppy fit, emma starts to stop acting like the chill girl



| | | | | | |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 6:00 AM | | | | | Breakfast |
| 7:00 AM | | | | | Scene 11 |
| 8:00 AM | | | | | Scene 11 |
| 9:00 AM | Breakfast | Breakfast | OFF | Breakfast | Scene 11-1 |
| 10:00 AM | Team Meetings | OFF | Breakfast | Actor Rehearsal | Scene 11-3 |
| 11:00 AM | Hour 1 | OFF | Actor Rehearsal | Actor Rehearsal | Scene 11-3 |
| 12:00 PM | Hour 2 | Load In | Actor Rehearsal | Actor Rehearsal | Scene 11-3 |
| 1:00 PM | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch |
| 2:00 PM | Hour 3 | Scout | Tech Rehearsal | Scene 3 | lol |
| 3:00 PM | Hour 4 | Tech Grab | Tech Rehearsal | Scene 3 | Scene 7/9 |
| 4:00 PM | Hour 5 | Tech Grab | Actor Rehearsal | Scene 3 | Scene 2/8-1 |
| 5:00 PM | Hour 6 | Tech Grab | Actor Rehearsal | Load Out | Scene 8 |
| 6:00 PM | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner |
| 7:00 PM | Hour 7 | Prop Source/Slush | Prop Runs/Final Prep | Scene 1/1-1 | Scene 8-1 |
| 8:00 PM | Hour 8 | Prop Source/Slush | Prop Runs/Final Prep | Scene 1/1-1 | Scene 8-1 |
| 9:00 PM | Hour 9 | Prop Source/Slush | Prop Runs/Final Prep | Scene 1/1-1 | Scene 8-1 |
| 10:00 PM | Hour 10 | Meetings | Prop Runs/Final Prep | Scene 1/1-1 | Scene 8-1 |
| 11:00 PM | Hour 11 | Meetings | Prop Runs/Final Prep | Scene 1/1-1 | Fight Rehearsal |
| MIDNIGHT | | | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Director: Nabeel Jan AD(s): Eric Ducos, Veronika Orlovska DP: Ian Dugan Gaffer(s): Inna Lazouski, Gabi Miko | DINNER PARTY | | DATE: 01/15/23 |
| | CALL TIME: 10:30 AM EST Actor pickups 10:15 PM (individual call-times listed below) (Wrap at midnight) | | BREAKFAST: 10:00 AM LUNCH: 3:00 PM DINNER: 7:00 PM |
| | WEATHER: Sunny, L: 23°F and H: 39°F | | SUNRISE: 7:30 AM — SUNSET: 5:04 PM |

| | |
|---|--|
| LOCATION: | Nearest Hospital to Set: |
| Colonial Pines Farm Estate, 4075 Old Turnpike Rd, Lewisburg PA 17837 | Evangelical Community Hospital, 1 Hospital Dr, Lewisburg, PA 17837 Phone: (570) 522-2000 |

| Actors | Pickup | Call Time | Comments |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|--|
| Samir, Simone, Nina, Emma | N/A | 10:30 AM | Breakfast will be available upon arrival |
| Andy | 11:00 AM | 11:00 AM | Breakfast will be available upon arrival |

| # | Scene Description | Cast | Pgs | Location |
|------|---|---------------|-------|-------------|
| 11-2 | Simone prepares to kill the survivors ziptied inside the house. Samir There's a struggle. Samir gets Simone's gun, forcing her to leave. He explains the murders and offers the survivors a chance to flee. | Samir, Simone | 32-33 | Dining Room |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|------|-------|-------------|------|----|---------|-------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 5 | | INT. | EVE | Living Room | W/CU | 50 | | Static | | Close-up on basement door, rack to Samir in BG |
| 7-1 | B | INT. | NIGHT | Hallway | MCU | 50 | | Static | | Door REVERSE (SHOOT WITH 5) |
| 5 | A | INT. | EVE | Living Room | W | 28 | Gun POV | Static | Wow --> sitting | Andy, all behind |
| 5 | B | INT. | EVE | Living Room | M | 50 | | Shoulder | | Emma/Andy |
| 5 | C | INT. | EVE | Living Room | M | 50 | | Shoulder | OTS E/A | Samir |
| 5 | D | | | | M | 50 | | Shoulder | | Nina |
| 5 | E | | | | MW | 50 | | Shoulder Tracking Vibes | | Emma/Andy/Nina |
| 5 | F | INT. | EVE | Living Room | CU | 50 | | Shoulder | Nina story | Samir through rails |
| 5 | G | INT. | EVE | Living Room | M | 50 | | Shoulder | | Gun INSERT |

VI. Principal Photography

Shooting this film was a surreal experience. The biggest challenge I experienced was balancing delegating tasks to my teams with keeping myself focused on what a director is specifically meant to do. Two things that I implemented to ensure I would accomplish this were nightly team meetings where each department could discuss what was going well and what was going poorly, and two days at the top of the shoot to solely build rigs, rehearse, and block each scene in the space. This was especially helpful for my sound department which was able to go to each room and figure out what appliances needed to be unplugged and for my camera department to create floor plans and storyboards for each scene.

This was especially important for two scenes that I had trouble blocking and directing. The two longer ensemble conversation scenes in the living room (scenes five and eight) were parallel to one another, but take place before and after Sarah's body is found. I wanted to keep a large part of the blocking consistent but have them move slightly to communicate a shift in status. The main swap I performed was between Andy/Emma and Samir, who took each others' seats in the aftermath of the death. I was incredibly interested in using the railings coming down the stairs to entrap whoever was sitting on the staircase, and I decided that as Emma began to feel the metaphorical walls of the situation come crashing in on her she should take that seat while Samir could position himself closest to the door.

VII. Post-Production

Post-production is unequivocally my least favorite part of this process. While it is where the most effective decisions are made, it is also where you have the opportunity to rewatch every mistake you have made during the process over and over again. While this may be a pessimistic view of the process, I also recognize how powerful this section is. Sound design is almost entirely done in post-production, and this film in particular has allowed me to see how important sound design is. Adding sound back into scenes where refrigerators were unplugged and ambient noise was deadened has shown me just how much space there is to play within environments. One aspect of my sound design for this film is my use of thunder to signal when Samir is getting closer to being caught. Throughout the film, rain comes and goes, and thunder signals when it

gets closer. Connecting this to the motifs of the film, thunder also signals when the metaphorical rain of Samir's defeat is imminent.

There are two moments I would like to examine, paying particular attention to my post-production process and sound design. The first is when the group enters the house for the first time. Adding a smoke alarm, room tone, and the dialogue from the actors was a fun process that allowed me to understand how sound played in the metaphorical space of the living room, where much of the later action takes place. It was also interesting to introduce the sound of what rainfall sounds like within the home so that later in the film it feels more like a callback than an introduction to a new sensation. Secondly, the sound design of the bedroom scene towards the end of the film was another fun challenge for me. I was looking to differentiate it from other scenes in the piece because it is now morning time in the film, and the characters are beginning to see a way out. Adding sounds for the struggle by the door in this scene was also fun because there was no actor on the other side of the doorframe during the shoot, so adding shuffling and door knob rattles was paramount in creating the feeling that someone was trying to break into the house.

VIII. Reflection

This process was the most rigorous academic and creative project I have ever done. It has also taught me the most about filmmaking and how to lead a creative project. Reflecting on pre-production, I wish I had adapted a preexisting work so that less of my time was consumed by writing drafts of my text. This would also help me distance myself from ideas and lines that I became attached to toward the end of the process to create a more streamlined post-production. The challenge of writing and directing my own work was a valuable lesson, however, and one that taught me how to remain confident and love my own writing when crises of self-doubt come up. Reflecting on my inspirations, I am happy with my attempt to subvert the whodunit/murder mystery genre. Having identified the tropes and common tools of the form, I was able to imbue the story with my own DNA and create a story worth telling. Out of all the stages of the piece, I believe principal photography was the most successful, and yielded both the best results and the most valuable lessons for my growth going forward. The biggest lessons I learned throughout this process were undoubtedly how to develop a draft from first ideas to a shooting script, how to

juggle many aspects of production at one time, and how to handle a full-scale post-production process.

Within these, there were many micro-lessons that were pivotal steps along the way. In developing a script, I learned the importance of writing characters with different voices instead of shaping them all around the way I think and speak. Although they all come from the same mind, their communication styles must be different and should reflect the inner workings of who they are as people. Understanding how to juggle production was paramount to my success because there is rarely a moment where you can choose to neglect certain areas of the film or delay responding to a department. Keeping one eye on the budget throughout this process is also important, as you cannot afford to over-promise resources in any part of the project, but you also need to make sure they have what they need to succeed.

Lastly, managing a large post-production workflow means you need to be organized. Having never undertaken something on this scale before, I learned so many small things as I went-- audio synchronization and footage cataloging saved me as I got deeper into my timelines, and any mistakes that I made early on widened as their significance became more apparent at the end of the process. Understanding the sheer magnitude of this step alone is important, and something I will take into consideration more strongly in the future.

IX. Conclusion

As I finish my time at Bucknell and round out my time within the Film and Media Studies program, I am overjoyed to say I am firmly on the path of not wondering “what if”. Samir is a character steeped in regret-- he feels as though he has run past his potential and, as a result, he lives out a self-fulfilling prophecy. By giving in to what he believes is inevitable, he condemns himself for never knowing what he could have been. I’m committed to doing the opposite-- in going after my dreams I am forcing myself to confront my fears and live my life at peace with that decision. *Last Week I Had This Dream That Everything Went According to Plan* is a large step toward that journey. Thank you for allowing me to take it.

X. Reading, Viewing, and Listening List

Everything, Everywhere, All at Once (The Daniels, 2022)

The World's End (Wright, 2013)

Hot Fuzz (Wright, 2007)

Chungking Express (Kar-Wai, 1994)

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (Amirpour, 2014)

The Mirror (Tarkovsky, 1975)

Kodachrome (Raso, 2017)

Intolerable Cruelty (Coen, 2003)

Blow-Up (Antonioni, 1966)

Good Morning (Ozu, 1959)

Prenom Carmen (Godard, 1983)

Bodies, Bodies, Bodies (Reijn, 2022)

Hereditary (Ari Aster, 2018)

Midsommar (Ari Aster, 2019)

The Barbarian (Creggar, 2022)

Skyfall (Mendes, 2012)

Get Out (Peele, 2017)

Knives Out (Johnson, 2019)

Knives Out II (Johnson, 2022)

The Illuminated Space, by Marilyn Freeman

Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualizing from Concept to Screen, by Steven D. Katz

Producing Great Sound for Film and Video, by Jay Rose

Audio-Vision, by Michel Chion

Hitchcock's Romantic Irony, by Richard Allen

The Team Deakins Podcast (Damien Chazelle, Sam Mendes), Roger Deakins

The A24 Podcast (The Daniels and Daniel Radcliffe), A24

A Brief Note on Revisions

My thesis was Accepted with Revisions-- the Council asked that I produce a 27-minute cut of the film (down around 5 minutes from the previous version). This was an incredibly painstaking process but one that I am grateful to have undertaken. It is hard to erase your own work, but finding it within yourself to strip the story down to what it needs to be, rather than what you would ideally like it to be, is an important lesson in editing.