

Fall 5-16-2014

## Turtle Beach

Weizhong Huang  
whuang1@uno.edu

Weizhong Huang

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Huang, Weizhong and Huang, Weizhong, "Turtle Beach" (2014). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1811.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1811>

This Thesis-Restricted is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis-Restricted in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis-Restricted has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

Turtle Beach

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
In  
Film and Theatre Arts  
Film Production

by  
Weizhong Huang  
B.S. Hangzhou University, 2008  
M.S. Temple University, 2011  
May 2014

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee and whole FTCA department of the University of New Orleans to provide me the education and recourse I need to accomplish *Turtle Beach*. Many dedicated and talented Professors, peer graduate and undergraduate students helped me to achieve a successful thesis project.

I would also like to thank the government of Louisiana and local residents being supportive to student film makers and provide me the amazing looking location to make this film come true.

I could only imagine making a film like Turtle Beach three years ago before I entered the Graduate program of the University of New Orleans. I really enjoyed the time here and I believe the experience I have gained here will be essential to help me achieve further film making goals in the future.

Weizhong Huang

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Chapter1.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Chapter2.....	4
Writing.....	4
Production Design.....	13
Casting and Crew.....	17
Directing.....	19
Cinematography.....	20
Editing.....	22
Sound.....	22
Technology.....	23
Chapter 3.....	25
Analysis.....	25
Chapter 4.....	26
Conclusion.....	26
Reference.....	28
Vita.....	29

## **Abstract**

This paper thoroughly examines the production of the thesis film, Turtle Beach. Each area of the film's production is carefully dissected, including the writing, production design, cinematography, directing, editing, sound, technology, workflow and visual effect. Specific attention has been paid to writing and cinematography, and how they affect editing.

Turtle Beach, Thesis, Narrative, World War II, Pacific War

## **Chapter 1**

### *Introduction*

My initial goal was to make a short film that exposes a basic flaw in humanity, that is, fear of uncertainty and desire to take control over the uncertainty. For that purpose I set my story in one of the most fear and uncertain situation humans have ever created, war. Among all the wars, WWII has had the broadest influence. Many movies have been made to discuss humanity, good or bad, through the relationship between armies and individual soldiers from both factions of wars. However, I believe that my perspective is unique. At the end of my story, a great misunderstanding is built up between Adam and Saito and forces one of them to execute extreme action which seems to be reasonable during war time, to take out another human being's life. An even greater mistake occurs in the climax of the movie when Saito shot Leon by mistake and now both of them have to suffer the cruel consequences brought by war and their own choices. The movie has an open end leaving Adam an opportunity of redemption by forgiving another wrong deed performed by his enemy.

The idea of the story is related to my background being raised in Mainland China. Starting from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, over a hundred year's war including First and Second Opium War, First and Second Sino-Japan War, WWII,

Chinese Civil War, and Korean War brought tremendous agony to the people in China. Even after the war, a lot of people, including some of my family direct ancestors, were persecuted by the communist force. I am extremely shocked by the hatred and cruelty perpetrated during war and persecution. I start to think, what makes a person hate one another so much that they have to take each other's lives, despite the fact that they've never met before. My conclusion is that we are all afraid of things we don't know; we are all trying to control the uncertainty. This is a flaw which exists in most human beings and it explains one of the many causes of wars and persecution to people holding different ideas.

I agree that there are other causes in war such as desire of land and resources. I also agree that sometimes war is inevitable and merely an act of justice. But in my thesis, I only wish to focus on my point.

Almost all the films I made before are drama, and most of them involve love. I like drama because this is a genre that can make audience feel the same the film maker feels. I like the idea that I can use my film to connect with audience's heart and make them echo with me, so I decide to stick with drama for my thesis. However, I did not include romance this time. I believe romantic love is just one of many relationships humans can have with each other. There are many relationships other than romantic love that worth explore.

## **Chapter 2**

### *Writing*

Turtle Beach is about two WWII soldiers Adam and Leon are washed up on shore of a small pacific island after their ship is destroyed by Kamikaze attacks. They soon find out that the island is occupied by two Japanese soldiers Saito and Taka. However, the Japanese have been marooned on the island for years and have no intention to fight the War anymore; instead they want the American to help them escape the island. After Saito helps Leon with his wound, Adam becomes soften up with the Japanese and no longer treat them as enemy. The Utopia situation is soon broken when Adam discovers Saito using the radio that he previously claimed was broken for years.

After changing the script a couple of times, I was able to focus my story on one of the US soldiers, Sergeant Adam (28). I intend to use the other characters' personality to reflect Adam's desire of control and fear of uncertainty, but at the same time, the conflict between his humanity and doing his duty. I want the ending to be strong, the consequence to be irreversible, thus I think of death, an element strong enough to make everyone change. I created Leon as an innocent figure. I used the whole movie to establish that he



is harmless and friendly, he easily to connect to everyone else. I would like the audience to connect with Leon too, feel sympathy to him. Then I killed him in the end. I wish by doing that, audience can somehow understand the cruelty and unfairness of the War better. Most soldiers would rather not to be in a War if they had a choice, and the most innocent people always die fast in the war.

My through line is "Enemies can become friends if not for war, however, people don't usually have a choice."

The story follows the classic Three Act structure.

In the first act, the conflict is introduced by the nature of soldiers belong to the two sides of war. The second act resolves this conflict when US soldier and Japanese soldier has to work together to survive on the island. The third act re-introduces the conflict and lead to the climax, the shooting and the innocent's death. I have a parallel universe scene in which WWII never happens and four characters cross passes randomly in a sushi bar in Japan. But I insert this scene in act three, right before Leon's death to emphasize how war can destroy life easily.

Upon having my thesis idea I had to make a choice; do I make the story happen in the European theater or the Pacific Theater. I decided to choose the latter one for the following reasons. First of all, I feel less culturally connected to the European theater. I've been reading WWII books and watching movies about WWII Europe since I was young, I have enough knowledge how war

devastated Europe, however being raised in China, I am more connected to the Pacific theater since China was a part of it. Secondly, the weather in New Orleans is more close to Pacific than Europe. When we talk about WWII Europe, we always think of soldiers dress in thick coat and jacket, snow covered battle field with endless trenches and a lot of tanks. When we talk about WWII Pacific, we think of ocean, islands, palm trees and infantry wearing short sleeves and T shirts, which the New Orleans and my budget can provide. Last but not least, I intend to market this movie both in America and China. I remember whenever the Japanese Prime Minister visits the war shrine, there are always some young people in China burning Japanese cars and destroying Japanese restaurants and stores despite the fact that all the Japanese cars they burnt belong to Chinese and none of the Japanese restaurant owners ever invaded China. Most likely they choose to live in China because they like the country. To me those young people are blinded by hatred, a hatred caused by the fear of uncertainty and anger from things they can't control. I would like to use my movie to give them a new perspective.

The story begins with US Sergeant Adam Shepherd and Private Leon Krause washed upon shore of a small island on Pacific Ocean after their ship is destroyed by desperate Kamikaze attack squad in the last days of the war.

I created two US survivors instead of one because I would like to convey two very different responses a soldier could have in war. Adam has a strong sense of friend-foe relationship. War strips away who a person is as a human

being, leaving only the color of the uniform to tell you where your gun should be pointing. Adam reflects this point. When he sees Saito, in Japanese uniform, his first reaction is to pull out his gun and pull the trigger. But his gun is jammed. I intended to put death into my script, but I introduce death after I build up the characters, after the audiences are connected with the victim. I agree that death brings conflict in a story, however, as a writer; I have no intention to raise the conflict too high in the beginning of the movie.

Leon, on the other hand, conveys another perspective of the war. He sees through the uniform and considers the person beneath the enemy uniform a human being. As long as the enemies are friendly and has no intention to fight, Leon is willing to develop a friendly relationship with them based on human connection. This approach is hardly welcomed during the wartime. However it is a respectful attitude and almost a virtue during peaceful time like ours.

I introduced three of the four characters in the first scene. I made Adam a US Sergeant. As a noncommissioned officer, Sergeant is a leader of several soldiers in field, usually someone who's been through battles. This position fits Adam's personality and explains his harshness on Japanese soldiers, and sometimes, on Leon as well. Also as a seasoned fighter, Adam can easily overcome the Japanese soldiers, which happens later in the story. However as a Sergeant, Adam is sometimes stubborn and hard to reason with which leads to the misunderstanding from Saito. I made Leon Private, the lowest ranked soldier in the US military system. It fits Leon's personality. He's young,

recruited directly from college, probably got drafted or naively enlisted. Leon has never been to war before and he read a lot of novels about Utopia as well as science fiction. One of those book is *Sidewise in Time* (1934) by Murray Leinster, which is one of the most influential book regarding Parallel Universes. Although the name of the book and the author are not directly mentioned in the movie, I expect audiences who read the book will have connection with the character when Leon mentions some of the content from the book such as that the Roman Empire never fell, and South won the Civil War. My personal connection with the book is I read it from a Chinese Sci-Fi story collection *Sci-Fi World Translated Collections* (科幻世界译文版, 1996) when I was in middle school. The book contains famous Sci-Fi stories collected internationally, translated to Chinese, including *Sidewise in Time*, *The Call of Cthulhu* by H.P. Lovecraft and some Issac Asimov stories.

After half a year's re-writing and polishing, every detail in the movie was carefully planned and follows a logical make the story realism yet still dramatic.

I made Leon wounded with his hand for several reasons. First, it seems unnatural to have both US survivors appear intact after a Kamikaze attack which is notorious for its result in high damage. Secondly, it emphasizes Leon is relatively in-experienced in war and probably didn't dodge the blast when it happened. On the other hand, Adam is more likely to react to the attack and takes care of himself better. If Adam's survival is a combination of luck and skill, Leon's survival is pure luck, which doesn't always happen in war.

It also shows the aftermath of the attack. Although I didn't show the attack in the movie due to lack of budget and skill to create a real sea battle scene, I hope it leaves audiences some space of imagination from Leon's wound. Most importantly, I wanted to create several obstacles that US soldiers and Japanese soldiers have to go through together and treating Leon's wound is one of them. Although the real treatment doesn't happen until later in the camp, the initial care Saito provides Leon drastically establishes Saito's harmlessness as well as giving Adam a reason not to kill the Japanese after the first attempt.

I introduced the fourth character Taka at the second scene to raise the conflict a bit, now the US soldiers lost the advantage of numbers not to mention that Leon is wounded. Taka is young and strong, when he comes out of the tent he could be a potential threat. I created a classic Mexican standoff situation to show the conflict except that both US soldiers have guns. The tension eases when Taka shows his eagerness to leave the island. I made Taka an English teacher before he was recruited so he can communicate with Adam and Leon. Although in one of my reference movies, *Hell in the Pacific* (John Boorman, 1968), neither party speaks the opposite language. The situation can be really interesting, I think making one of the Japanese soldiers speaking English fits my story better. However, Saito remains not able to understand any English and his response to Adam and Leon mainly depends on his perception on the emotion of the speaker.

There comes the fifth Character, Kenji, a turtle which doesn't have a lot of screen time but serves some important purposes. The idea of Kenji comes from *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000) in which the main Character Chuck named a volleyball Wilson and imagine it is a human being after being isolated on an island for years by himself. Kenji is the pet of the Japanese, mainly Saito's because he enjoys staying on the island while Taka is eager to leave the island, he is less connected to the island than Saito as well as objects on it. Painting a Japanese flag on Kenji's back is also inspired by *Cast Away* where Chuck paints a human face on the volleyball to make it a character. However, painting a Japanese flag on a turtle has a deeper layer of meaning. During WWII, Japan took hundreds of island in the pacific. Painting a Japanese flag on a none Japanese turtle is a manifest of the act. It is also ironic about invading another land and claiming it one's own by just putting marks on it and its people. Another meaning of Kenji is that I want to emphasize that during the war, individuals has no choice to fight or not or who to fight for. By painting a Japanese flag on Keji's back makes him wearing a Japanese uniform with just like the Saito and Taka, who are wearing Japanese uniforms all the time. The uniform automatically labeled someone friend or foe despite the individual inside of it. Even a turtle is marked as a Japanese turtle.

The movie begins with Kenji crawling slowly across Adam's face when he lies on the sand, unconscious. He then wakes up and sees wounded Leon and the Japanese soldier Saito. To his surprise, Saito is trying to fix Leon's arm.

They then move to the Japanese camp where Adam meets Taka. To more of his surprise, Taka asks Adam to bring him off the island and offers them hospitality when he finds out the US ship is destroyed. The first act ends when Leon collapses from the infection from his wounds. During the whole act, Adam always has his pistol in his hand.

In Act Two I created several “tasks” that Adam has to go through with the Japanese. After completing those tasks, Adam gradually softens up and accepts the Japanese’s friendship. The first task is to save Leon from infection. Although Adam and Taka fail to do anything significant to help the private, all of them working towards a same goal, saving Leon’s life. The second task I created is trying to attract attention from a sea battle happening miles away in the night. In order to get off the island, Adam naturally joins the Japanese and shouts out to the sea. The third task is to catch fish. Adam refused to let Taka use bayonet earlier in the act. However he is softened up enough that he gladly offers Taka the bayonet. In this act I also established the connection between Saito and Leon, who is recovering now, and the relationship between Adam and Leon. The two US soldiers have their first and only in- depth conversation in this act where we can see Leon’s fantasy in peace and Adam’s dilemma. The last task is Adam goes to beach with Leon and Taka to learn how to fish. At this point, Adam completely lays his guard down. In my entire script, this point is where the characters have most happiness with, which will, of course, be reversed soon.

While I was writing the Act Two, I hit a wall. After Adam agrees to go fishing with Taka and Leon, I couldn't give him a reason to go back to camp when he stumbles on Saito using the radio. After weeks and weeks of brain storming, every idea I came out with is either not sufficient or not natural. I kept on seeking solutions by creating new ideas rather than look back from the things I already created. The solution was simple, Kenji! The fishing party finds Kenji on the beach; Adam picks it up, and brings it back to Saito at the camp. In fact, Adam volunteers to bring Kenji back to Saito is a sign of friendship, which serves as a high point of the great reverse when he discovers Saito is listening the radio while everyone is away, bringing Act Three.

After a long absence during Act Two, the War situation is back and this time it is interpreted by action while in Act One the conflict is mainly introduced verbally. I believe in film language, action is always stronger than dialogue.

Although Saito tries to explain that he just wants to check if the war is over, Adam doesn't listen, nor does he understand the language. Blinded by the rage of seeming betrayed, Adam pulls out his pistol. Saito knocks him out with the rifle from behind and escapes into the forest.

Saito runs through the woods and grabs a bullet from his secret satchel, where he also hid the radio part.

Adam goes to the beach and neutralizes Taka by attacking him off-guard and tying him up. After commanding Leon to go with him to hunt



Saito, Adam gives the private his gun and helmet. This action is supposed to keep Leon safer; however, it is the same action that kills him later.

The climax of the movie happens in the forest, where Saito mistakes Leon as Adam by seeing from dense forest the helmet and pistol Adam was wearing throughout the most of the movie. Saito shoots Leon but soon after he finds out the mistake and runs to him try to save him. Adam is shocked. He charges to Saito with his spear but halts when he sees Saito pushing his hands on Leon's wound, crying. Saito cares about Leon as much as Adam does, but Leon is shot in his throat and far beyond being rescued. The scene ends with Adam collapse with Saito still crying over Leon's body.

I insert the parallel universe at this critical point. If I did things right, audiences are connected with Leon and will feel sympathy when Leon dies. This is a perfect place to put the parallel universe scene in which War never happens. By doing this, I hope to make my logline loud and clear; Enemies could be friends if not for War.

However, the parallel universe scene is a little confusing according to the feedback I got after sending the script to professors and friends. I also feel that the movie shouldn't end in alternative universe since my purpose is to create a tragic ending. I added one more scene in the end that while Taka is struggling on the beach with his hands restrained, he sees Kenji crawling slowly to the sea. No one is going to stop him this time. I like this ending

because it corresponds the beginning of the movie in which Kenji crawls in front of Adam's face. However, Kenji never reaches the sea.

The movie has an open ending. How Adam is going to face the new relationship he created on the island is unknown to audiences and I would like them to think about it.

### *Production Design*

Production design is a major part of this film. I had many meeting with my production designer Brandon Melancon in order to make every single object in the frame looks as authentic as possible. Since none of us has any experience in design a war movie, we found some movies with similar background to study with. The main movie we researched on is *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malic , 1998). The movie has a descent amount of screen time for Japanese troopers and a very detailed Japanese field camp on a Pacific island to study with, including the clothing, weapon, radio and small objects in the camp. The most useful thing we learned is the look of a simple Japanese pavilion made by bamboo frame covered with palm tree leaves. We studied the structure from some different angels from the movie and we decided to build one of those to put the radio in.

The location owner Rene Feran at Sanctuary, a gated community, let us to use as many palm leaves as we need however getting the bamboo might be a problem.

I noticed that there are many bamboos growing on UNO campus and one day Professor Retz ran across the groundkeepers trimming the bamboos. He called me immediately and I got as many bamboos as we needed that day.

Building the set is easier than we thought thanks for the wild setting of the location and Brandon's Boy Scout experience. It only takes us a day and half to get the set ready.

We contacted a manager at the National WWII museum in New Orleans before we visited him. The manager carefully introduced us a lot of authentic items from both sides during the war such as canteens, ammo pouches, and leg wraps. We carefully took photo copies of each item and purchased them from internet with a relatively low price.

However there was one essential item which troubled me, the radio.

As the source of conflict, I have to get an authentic looking radio for close ups and as background prop. However, the cheapest authentic Japanese WWII radio costs more than 500 dollars, money that I don't have. After discussing it with art crew, we purchased a US radio and I replace all the English letters with Kanji, since I am the only person who knows how to write Chinese in the crew. I'm not proud of my hand writing because audiences can still tell that the radio is not authentic if they look careful enough. But that's the best thing we could do at that time and I'm pretty happy about the result.

The next thing which comes up is costuming and props. Luckily I found a small workshop when I visited home last summer. After I sent them pictures

of uniforms from both sides, the workshop owner was able to custom make costumes for my thesis with a very low price. Also thanks to the booming Chinese film industry, I was able to purchase most of the authentic accessories cheap there. After I came back to US, I started to work on the props. I bought the authentic gun and rifle from internet, I was surprised how easy I can obtain them with such a low price in America and how authentic they looks, acquiring prop guns for a student film is nearly impossible in China. I took advantage of the economy and system in both Countries and manage to contain my costume and prop budget under 2,000 dollars, which is a lot lower than my original plan.

However, the color of the US uniforms is a little off since the workshop has never made American uniforms before. Brandon and I paid another visit to WWII museum to confirm the color of uniforms before we mix the color to dye the uniforms.

Since I have no intention to show any battle scene, I was not looking at the traditional pacific war movies as a reference for my production design. Instead, I want to show the isolation and the subtle relationship between my characters. In this case, the best movies to be an example of my production design are *Hell in the Pacific*, and *Thin Red Lin* . *Hell in the Pacific* talks about the relationship between an American pilot and a Japanese deserter on an island. I would like to create a world in which the survival against the force of nature is the greatest concern. *The Thin Red Line* has some battle scenes but

every death in this movie counts. When I was watching it, I felt connected to every single character, and felt sympathetic when I watched them die. This is the exact feeling I want the audience to feel when they see Leon dying. To emphasize the moment, I asked Brandon, my production designer, to test the blood effect, and using a system to pump the blood through a pipe to simulate arterial bleeding. And the result, as we can see in the movie, is remarkable.

The biggest challenges for my story are finding the location and actors. NOLA is in a sub tropic zone and has a lot of forest cover; however, my story is authentic that I'd have to find a most believable location, a beach with some vegetation coverage. I did some research and find out that although NOLA is close to the Gulf of Mexico, but the actual beach is far away. So I turned my eyes to another potential "sea": Lake Pontchartrain. The lake is vast, connect to the ocean and most importantly, it has waves. My location manager Kevin Korson, suggested us to look on Google maps first. We located several possible beaches and then Kevin went ahead to talk to the owners before we actually go there to film. I don't really like the beach that UNO owns and we couldn't get permission to shoot in Lincoln Beach due to its over 50 years un-management condition. We had to set our eyes across the lake on the north shore. After we scouted Fountainebleau State Park, we found it's the best location for us. Since the State Park and the University are both operated by the State of Louisiana and my proposal was very specific. We got the permission in almost no time. The next location is the camp in the forest. We

again looked through the satellite image from Google Map and went to a nearby forest in The Sanctuary. The owner of the plantation Rene is very friendly and helpful. Also since it is a private land I brought my art team there to build the camp before the shoot, which saved a lot of time. I then used my connection in Chinese Student and Scholar Association to find Mr. Wai, who owns a Japanese style Sushi Bar in Lakeview. Mr. Wai is kind enough to open the sushi bar very early in the morning before regular business hours so we could have a controlled environment to shoot.

I am very pleased and impressed by the environment and conveniences the University, the State and the private citizens brought me as a student film maker. I didn't pay anything for all of my locations and the owners of the properties were extremely supportive and helpful.

### *Casting and Crew*

Although I casted three non-Japanese speaking Characters with little frustration, finding the actor who speaks Japanese and looks right didn't go as smooth. We examined a lot of posts online from local agencies, we send out flyers in local theaters, we visited almost every sushi bar in the city, but all we've got was Asian Actors who don't speak Japanese, or Japanese people who cannot act. We did have some back up plans such as changing the script or the Character but it was more of a compromise than an actual plan.

Once again fate smiled on me. One month before the shoot, I got a call from Joji Yoshida all the way from Hawaii. It turns out although the agencies couldn't refer me to anyone, they sent out a mass E-mail to everyone in their Database. A local actor Lance Nichols then forwards the information to Joji in Hawaii. Joji was casted in Battle Ship and Dallas Buyers Club. He sent me a video audition and he fits right in the role. One minute ago I was worried that I wouldn't find an actor for the role and a minute after I was offered the opportunity to work with an actor who has a lot experience at the professional level.

The only problem is Joji is almost half a world away. However, since I saved a lot of money from location and costume, I was able to fly him in and accommodate him during the shoot. And Joji waived me from the SAG wage as well.

As for crew, I ended up to have around twenty-five people. Most of them were from my crew in Ouroboros. So I trusted them as they trusted me. I really appreciate this trust when I was on set. It created a certain tacit and harmonious connection and understanding among the crew members which not only makes everything more efficient, but also pushes the project to a higher artistic level. I do believe that the attitude and mood of the crew, not just the director and the cinematographer, but the whole crew, will be taken account into the result of a movie. One example is when Wong Kar-Wai was shooting Happy Together in Buenos Aires, he couldn't get the feeling of

homesickness from the footage he shot until he made the crew to stay in this foreign land for so long that the whole crew, from actors to a grip, became homesick, then he finally found the feeling that he was looking for.

The new joined crew members are just as good; they merged into my old group with no problem. I think one thing helps a lot knows someone as a person before I made him/her a crew member. One's attitude towards life, we call it general approaches, will usually reflect their work attitude. I did have my crafty person bailed on me first day, but by knowing her as a person I was prepared for it. I replaced her for the rest of the shoot.

### *Directing*

The movie I did research on in terms of directing style is Polanski's *Knife in the Water*. Although it is story about marriage relationships, there are still a lot I used for my thesis. I admire the subtle emotion change between the characters and the way they are driven by desire, which ultimately leads to destructive actions. I believe deep inside, Polanski also wanted to discuss some flaws of humanity; at least that's how I perceived it when I watched the movie. There are similar moments in this love drama and my war drama. We can see jealousy, fear of losing control, refusing to understand others, and extreme actions. I think these are very similar emotions but showed in different ways.



However, we experienced some frustration at day 5. It was a fighting scene when Adam finds out Saito is listening the radio. I didn't plan out the blocking very well resulting in we spending too much time on that single scene. Actors got frustrated too because I had to change things constantly to have the fight look good on camera. A more serious result is we didn't have enough time to shoot the last scene which Saito kills Leon, so we have to re-shoot part of it the next day.

Another obstacle that I encountered in terms of directing is that my actors have different acting styles. My directing style has a lot of freedom. I usually point my actors to a basic direction and let them do the details. I will let them know which parts they did I like, and part I don't during the takes and they will adjust. This method works well on three of my actors however one of my actors only did according things in my direction, no more, no less. I had to use a different approach on him by telling him specifically every detail that he had to do during scenes.

After I work with my actors for several days I know their styles and this obstacle are easily overcome.

### *Cinematography*

Before the summer break my cinematographer Andrea Kuehnel and I had some common idea how we are going to shoot this movie, however, after we

had our respective internships in our home countries, our ideas became quite different when we met again in the US.

The director I worked with during the break is a strong believer of coverage. He will almost always have two cameras set up from different angles. One reason is they simply had extra cameras and crew to spend, the other reason is one of the actors they used is a celebrity in China and his daily rate almost can buy a RED.

However, Andrea worked for an independent movie with a small crew and very limited budget in Germany. The method they were using is fewer set ups, but using camera movement and actors blocking to realize angle change in one shot.

After several meetings, we decide to go with Andrea's experience for following reasons.

First of all, our visual reference *The Thin Red Line* has a large number of hand held shots. Intending to make the majority of my movie hand held, we have the mobility to change the camera angle in a single shot. The camera man we have, Trenton Mynatt, is an experienced camera operator with remarkable stamina. After attending our meeting, he claims that it is a good idea and he is more than willing to do it. Secondly, I have a complicated shot list, but changing camera angle in one take will merge a lot of the shots on the list, resulting in fewer set ups thus reduce the risk of not being able to finish a

scheduled shooting day. Last but not least, I personally think it is an inspired idea and would like to try it.

However, the result of this change is it requires a lot of rehearsal with the actors. Since we tried to always have a fore ground, a middle ground and a back ground in the frame at the same time, the rehearsal involves not just actors, but camera teams too. The focus pulling needs to be decisive, comprehend with the camera movement and actor positions, which means more rehearse.

### *Editing*

I finished cutting my picture in less than a month after I started. I think this achievement happens not only because I have wonderful editors, but also due to the planning. When I was writing the script, I already had a basic idea how the story is going to be told on screen. When I made shot-lists with Andrea, the idea became more mature. And since we use camera movement instead of another set up for the coverage, which limits the choices of angles but increases editing time when we cut the movie. However, most shots were planned out and rehearsed ahead of the time so almost all of them work well for my movie and I don't really need additional coverage that we didn't get.

I believe that the story is written in a way that there is always something happening in front of the camera. I tried to make sure that the scenes in the frame serve the meaning and are interesting to watch.

I would like to show a tonal difference between inside of the camp and outside of the camp. Such comparison also related to the feeling of my character, he will feel secured and have more control inside of camp, but he feels uncertain whenever he is out exposed in exterior.

In this case, I used short and quick cuts when Adam feels danger and insecure. On the other hand, I used long takes when the tension eases up between the American and Japanese.

### *Sound*

Most of the times my sound operator had lav Mics installed on actors as well as having a boom mic. There is one scene when Adam and Taka shouted at the sea for help, sound is peaking. My sound recorder Lee Garcia realized it and requested a wild track pick up the next day. We replaced the dialog with wild tracks and it worked out well.

Post sound is processed at the moment; here are some of my thoughts before I started.

I would like my sound design to match my character's psychology. When he is afraid, he will hear dreadful sound, and when he is experiencing the change, I would like the environment to quiet down along with character's process of reformatting his mind.

I understood that wind is going to be my biggest problem before the shoot. I rented a Wind Shield from Richard in Post Sound, who is also very supportive

and almost charged me nothing for the equipment. I didn't encounter any problems related to wind noise in post.

### *Technology*

We used the RED Epic camera to shoot *Turtle Beach* which comes with a completely new workflow done through Scratch.

We took advantage of the fact that RED camera shoots footage in RAW format. So we planned out several days for night scenes which can be color corrected in scratch to match the night scene.

Some of my scenes involve a big portion of over exposed ocean in the background. We used HDRX in those scenes. HDRX is a high dynamic range shooting mode that basically the camera captures two pictures for each frame, one normal exposed, one over/under exposed to show the details the first picture cannot. We are also aware that the HDRX function generates a bigger file so we planned out some extra drive spaces for those takes.

I do need visual effect in two scenes. A big smoke indicating a sinking boat and a sea battle scene in the night. Nathan Tucker is my special effect creator. He will do the effects in After Effect then I will composite it to the conformed video.

### Chapter 3

#### *Analysis*

Over all, *Turtle Beach* achieves its original purpose in getting audiences to connect with the story and have the feeling I want them to have; feeling sympathetic about Leon's death and having the sense that world could be a better place without war. Ultimately, audiences will value more the peace time we live in and their own lives.

After showing some of my friends the earlier cut, I realize that the biggest problem the movie has right now is most of the audience didn't connect the sushi bar scene with parallel universe. I think one reason is because the sushi bar scene, which is the end of the movie, is too far away from the parallel universe concept is introduced, which is the middle point of the movie.

However, when I point it out most of them think it is a brilliant idea to put the parallel universe scene there.

I will run some more test screenings if the result stay the same, I will add in a flash back of Leon's girlfriend when he talks about parallel universe.

## **Chapter 4**

### *Conclusion*

Over all, I consider my thesis very successful, however, there still are some mistakes and pieces and bits I could've done better.

First of all, I'm very unhappy about Day 5. I could've choreographed the scene better upfront or hired an additional stunt coordinator that day. It looks like a simple stunt and I simply think we can just choreograph it on set which prove to be an unwise decision. In the future, when stunts are involved in my movie, I will make sure to prepare it more thoroughly.

Secondly, a major reason I made Turtle Beach without too much frustration is luck. I am lucky enough to get the locations for free, I'm lucky that Joji contacted me at the last minute, I'm lucky that it didn't rain too much during my shooting. And I don't like the feeling to be lucky, because next time I could easily be unlucky. I don't really have a backup plan for some of the elements

above such as weather and locations. I should've think of a plan B a lot earlier in production, maybe even when I was writing the script.

As for budget, I ended up spending around 5000 dollars rather than 8000 dollars initially as planned.

Although I have a decent cut of a thesis movie, I will continue work on it to make it better.

First of all, I will improve post sound then add in subtitles. I am doing the subtitles over again in After Effect since I have access to that program.

One thing worries me a little is music and score. Right now the movie doesn't have music and it doesn't affect the story. Like *Cast Away*, a story of isolation and loneliness, *Turtle Beach* doesn't have to have music. However, I'd like to try score it anyway. I have someone in mind who wants to do it, I will export a scene and let him try it. Music is my weak point, I couldn't give musician instructions until I hear the piece so I will give them more freedom.

I already submitted the movie to several film festivals will start to submit it to more, both in US and Asia.



## Reference

*Sidewise in Time* (Murray Leinster, 1934)

*Sci-Fi World Translated Collections* (科幻世界译文版, 1996)

*Hell in the Pacific* (John Boorman, 1968),

*Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000)

*The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malic , 1998)

*Hell in the Pacific* (John Boorman, 1968)

### **Vita**

Weizhong Huang is born and raised in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, China. He received his Bachelor degree in electric engineering in Hangzhou Dianzi University, 2008. He attended Temple University where he made a number of short films and received a degree of Master in Marketing in 2010. In 2011, Weizhong attended Master of Fine Art program concentrating in film productions at University of New Orleans.

Email Address: [whuang.film@gmail.com](mailto:whuang.film@gmail.com)

Permanent Address: South Hexing Rd, Dadi Apartment building #2 Apt 603

Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, China. Post Code: 314000

This Thesis is typed by the Author, Weizhong Huang

