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For Your Consideration

I started making films three years ago when I first joined the film program at Fayetteville High School. Over these three years I have progressed as a filmmaker, storyteller, and cinematographer. When I started the class I didn't know how to edit or operate a camera. I didn't know anything about shot composition or lighting and how this affects the film as a whole. On the first few projects I learned the basics of all the crew positions and their own importance. Personally I was drawn to cinematography and camera work for the close working relationship with the director and lighting team. The first films that I shot didn't look particularly good. As a team we had to work out some of the kinks of our own jobs. For me, I needed to learn about the importance of composition and framing by failing the first couple times. In the beginning most of my shots were shaky, too wide, or the pan wasn't smooth. After a while of shooting shorter films and getting comfortable with the camera I started to get the hang of making an aesthetically pleasing shot that would tell the story in the most accurate way I could. The short films generally went pretty smoothly as far as efficiency during the shooting and we were successful at creating a product we were all happy with. When we started working on larger films, however, we ran into problems with the scale of the production. The Beast was my first film to shoot that had special costume design, visual effects, and a larger cast and crew.

The most important lessons I learned on The Beast was how to communicate with my team in order to keep the production moving and be as efficient as possible. Many times on set we would find ourselves taking ten to fifteen minutes to get the actors and crew to transition to the next scene after completing one. Further into the shoot, after explaining what we want from the end product and making sure everyone is aware of the end goal for the shoot, we were able to stay more on task and efficient during the day. Part of staying efficient as well was talking to the crew position themselves about what they needed from me as the cinematographer. The editor came to set a couple days and during the shots that I knew we needed visual effects I was able to consult him on what would make it easier for him during the editing process. The scene with the firecracker was a good example of this. On the first take I didn't give the actor enough space on the left hand side of the screen. The communication with the editor resolved that issue, and shows a more convincing depiction of the scene.

Another problem as a cinematographer I came across on the beast was the practical restraints of a low budget film. This was the first film I shot that featured a gorilla costume so that posed some interesting limitations. The back of the beast costume doesn't make it all the way to the mask so I had to keep from showing the back of the beast as much as possible. However, in the beginning we didn't want to reveal the beast's face so we had to work around not showing both the front and the back of the beast. I decided to use P.O.V shots from the beast, as I think this clearly communicated some presence of a beast and avoided showing the costume. The editor also did a great job with the beast sounds to pull this effect off.

Overall the most important lesson I learned from making this film, was the importance of good, clear, focused communication.