

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2013

Transmission - A Radio Series

Marc Sollinger
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Radio Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sollinger, Marc, "Transmission - A Radio Series" (2013). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 14.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/14

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Transmission

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Marc Sollinger
Candidate for Bachelor of Science Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2013

Honors Capstone Project in Television, Radio, and Film

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
Advisor Title & Name

Capstone Project Reader: _____
Reader Title & Name

Honors Director: _____
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date: April 24, 2013

Abstract

'Transmission' is a serialized radio drama released via podcast. It consists of ten episodes, ranging from 8-30 minutes in length. It is fully voiced, with music and sound effects. The plot concerns a lone astronaut who finds himself stranded on an alien world. At first, he is completely alone, but soon discovers that the planet is both inhabited and post-apocalyptic, with tribes of nomadic, human-like creatures moving through the ruins of a once great civilization. The astronaut must uncover the mystery of what happened to this alien world, while also surviving the many dangers that lurk in the ruins. The show is aimed to be an exciting science-fiction romp.

'Transmission' was created in the style of old radio dramas of the 1930s and 40s, shows like 'The Shadow', 'Dragnet', and (although it wasn't serialized) Orson Welles' radio adaptation of 'The War of the Worlds'. Although radio and audio drama has fallen by the wayside somewhat, it is my intention to prove that audio drama can still be a vital medium for producing art.

To create 'Transmission', I wrote a script that incorporated dialogue, sound effects, and music. I then got actors to voice various parts, created and added sound effects to their dialogue, and hired a composer to write music to accompany the piece. I both produced and edited the episodes.

This has resulted in ten episodes of quality audio drama, with two and a half hours of content, which is on a CD that accompanies the work. I have also created a website for 'Transmission', and will release each episode to the wider public via iTunes.

It is my hope that 'Transmission' proves to be interesting, engaging, and most of all, fun to listen to.

© Marc Sollinger, April 24, 2013

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Reflective Essay..... | 1 |
| Summary of Capstone Project..... | 18 |

Reflective Essay

For my Capstone Project, I produced a ten-episode radio drama titled 'Transmission'. It's been a long journey, by last count I've spent well over 250 hours working on it, but all that work has resulted in something I'm extremely proud of and something that I think sums up my entire college career. In this essay I'll be examining my Capstone: putting it in a historical and cultural context, going through its development process, reflecting on the artistic choices that I made in writing and producing it, and acknowledging all the help and support that I have received.

To begin, I'd like to talk a little bit about my influences. I've always been drawn to the power of audio storytelling; when I was little my mother would play cassettes of Jules Verne audiobooks on long road trips, and I would thrill to the adventures of Phileas Fogg and Captain Nemo. And I've known I wanted to work in radio ever since I first heard the 'My Brilliant Plan' episode of 'This American Life'. There's something special about purely aural storytelling (to me it calls to mind early homo-sapiens telling each other stories by the firelight, and links us to an oral tradition that remains deeply ingrained in our identity as humans...but that's probably a digression for another essay), and it has a long history.

Radio storytelling has been around since the first days of the commercial medium, in the early 1920s. For over twenty years, from its birth until the rise of television, the radio was an immensely important

storytelling vessel. For many American families, it was a kind of media hearth; they would gather around and listen to music, news, sitcoms, and dramas. In fact, most every modern television genre has its roots in radio. But radio storytelling should not be seen as a mere precursor to television storytelling. Indeed, part of what I want 'Transmission' to do is to prove that aural storytelling can exist in a world with television and web video. If you go back and revisit programs from the 'Golden Age' of American radio, like 'The Mercury Radio Theater on the Air', 'Dragnet', and 'The Shadow, you find that they still hold up. Not just as interesting cultural documents, but as captivating entertainment and thought-provoking art.

Radio programs can be just as engaging as a movie or television show, and with the rise of podcasting, there's finally a 21st-century delivery system for new aural programs. People can listen to a show like 'Transmission' on their commute, while working out, or while doing household chores. And although there are a couple exceptions, for the most part there aren't any American podcasts or radio shows like 'Transmission': a fully voiced program with sound effects and production values. In making 'Transmission', I wanted it to fit into the context of both the modern podcast and the still relevant American radio shows of the 1930s and 40s, and I believe it does just that.

It is from the most famous single radio program of the 1930s that 'Transmission' takes its primary inspiration. Orson Welles' adaptation of 'The War of the Worlds' for 'The Mercury Radio Theater on the Air' is well

known for convincing a swath of America that aliens were invading, and listening to it, one can easily see why. The program, made up mostly of fake news bulletins, is harrowing and visceral, using radio's reliance on the listener's imagination to wonderful effect. The first time I heard it, more than seventy years after its broadcast, it genuinely scared me. This was during my freshman year, and I was already beginning to mull over topics for my Capstone. I knew I wanted to do something with radio, but up until that moment, I wasn't exactly sure what. In fact, I was fairly sure that I would do a long-form audio documentary in the style of 'This American Life'. But listening to 'The War of the Worlds', I was inspired to create a radio drama, to create a modern version of what I had just heard. Unlike 'The War of the Worlds', though, I decided, it would have multiple episodes, and be released via podcast.

One of the aspects of the program that intrigued me was its reliance on news bulletins, which give a vivid sense of realism. That's part of the reason why the show remains so terrifying. My original thought was to update this, to have my Capstone be created entirely through "found sound", an aural equivalent of 'The Blair Witch Project' or 'Paranormal Activity'. I began to brainstorm, racking my brain for some plot justification for this "found sound". Now, I've been a fan of Studs Terkel, the wonderful oral historian and chronicler of American life, for a while now, and for some strange reason I thought: "what if Studs Terkel was on an alien planet?" The idea intrigued me, and I followed its line of logic. If Studs

Terkel was on a distant planet, he'd probably conduct audio interviews with the strange aliens he met, exploring their culture and history, perhaps observing their art and song. I liked this, a sci-fi show in which the hero was an anthropologist. It appealed to my documentarian sensibilities.

So with this kernel of a concept, I began to conceive of a setting and plot. I asked myself why an anthropologist would be sent to an alien planet, and came up with the idea of humanity receiving a mysterious transmission (which eventually begat the title of the piece), and a lone astronaut being cryogenically frozen and sent to deep space to investigate. I knew from the beginning that the show would revolve around a lone protagonist, and not a group, primarily because I wanted a single narrative voice. If there were a group of astronauts, then the show would become about their group dynamics and conflict, rather than a Studs Terkel-esque quest for answers.

The anthropologist would crash on the alien world, damaging his or her equipment, leaving only an audio recorder to beam back his or her findings about the aliens that called this planet their home. From this, I expanded: what if the aliens weren't aliens at all? What if they were humans that had passed the lone astronaut in faster spaceships? What if they were primitive and nomadic, living amongst and around the ruins of the actual alien civilization, the one that had sent the transmission? The humans would have to look a bit alien for the lone astronaut to not automatically assume they were humans; maybe they had been

genetically modified so that their skin was a strange color, like purple? (I'm guessing this thought was probably influenced by my childhood love of 'Star Trek'.) Perhaps the prior civilization had been wiped out by some technological virus, the same virus that had left the humans "primitive" and nomadic? That would certainly leave space to explore themes dealing with humanity's over-reliance on technology. And the lone astronaut landing in a technologically advanced ship and encountering what he or she sees as a primitive culture would certainly give rise to an exploration of colonialism.

At this point, I had a general idea of the world I wanted to create and the themes I wanted to explore. I began to nail down character and plot. I thought it would be interesting if the lone astronaut traveled around with one of the nomadic tribes that populated the planet, so after researching a bit about Native American tribe structure and culture, I came up with four characters that the Lone Astronaut would interact with. They were: Cres, a headstrong female warrior; Rial, the village's male inner chief and a shaman/griot with a dark past; San, the village's female nonsense leader; and Tal, an excitable apprentice shaman/historian. I fleshed out the lone astronaut's character as well. I asked myself what type of person would agree to cryogenically freeze themselves just for the pursuit of knowledge, and I came up with Douglas Thompson, a deeply curious but reserved anthropologist. I also knew I needed to give the nomadic tribe some conflict, so I came up with an opposing tribe of

“barbarians” in the early formation of an empire. I then came to the conclusion that the opposing tribe should be in league with whatever had destroyed the old civilizations. But...in league with a virus? That didn't make sense, so I changed the virus to “evil technology monsters”, which would give me some great fight and chase scenes, and also give a sense of swashbuckling adventure to the program.

At this point, ‘Transmission’ was moving beyond my conception of an updated ‘War of the Worlds’. This may seem like it took me an afternoon to brainstorm, but these ideas were percolating in my head for nearly two years. And while those ideas were percolating, I was listening to other radio serials from the ‘Golden Age’ of American radio. Shows like ‘Dragnet’ and ‘The Shadow’, serials where excitement and suspense were prominent. Listening to those shows, I realized how well-suited audio storytelling was to tales of action and adventure. Purely aural shows force the listener to use his or her imagination, and what their imagination conjures up is usually much more terrifying or interesting or fascinating than anything visuals can convey. With these new influences, ‘Transmission’ became much more adventure and action focused. I decided that I would try and end on a cliffhanger every week, both as a hat-tip to the old radio serials, and because it would make the listeners eager to hear each new episode. I also decided to abandon the idea of “found sound”. Thompson would remain the dominant voice by narrating each episode, but having ‘Transmission’ tied down solely to what he could

record was constricting. With the move away from horror and towards adventure, the narrated format made sense. 'The Shadow' and 'The Lone Ranger' had similar formats, and I wanted to make something stylistically similar, although updated to include modern elements.

Along with these modern elements came a rejection of some of the...unsavory elements of the past. 'Golden Age' radio shows are artifacts of their time period, and that time period do not come across as very politically correct, according to 21st-century social mores. Frankly, the amount of racism and sexism on display is positively disheartening. To that point, while planning the story out, I made a concerted effort to include strong, complex female characters. Although the protagonist is a man, three out of the five main speaking roles are women; Cres saves the protagonist's life on five separate occasions, the nomadic tribe Thompson is attached to is led by a woman, and part of the way the "barbarian" culture is represented as being misguided is the fact that they have rigid gender roles.

I had been mulling this over and planning this out for years, until I decided to see if 'Transmission' would actually work. I wasn't exactly sure if this would all cohere to an exciting and entertaining program. In my junior year I was given a free-form project for a 'Producing Radio' class, and I seized upon the opportunity to make a test-pilot for the series. I began by writing out the first episode, in which Thompson wakes up with almost no memory of who he is and must guide his ship into crash-landing

on an alien planet. I then voiced Thompson myself, and added some minimal sound effects. To my surprise, the episode worked, and I had proved to myself that 'Transmission' could be a successful series. (Although I realized that I needed to get a good performer to voice Thompson, because I am an absolutely awful voice actor.)

First, I needed to write the script for the series. I did this the summer before my senior year, spending three days a week for two and a half months writing and re-writing each episode's script. I first wrote a plot document, with two major plots intertwining: Thompson discovering mysteries about the transmission and the nomadic tribe being attacked by the "barbarians". After mapping the natural starting and stopping points in the plot, I found I had ten episodes, with a two-parter for episodes three and four. I then narrowed my focus, writing up a general outline for each of the ten episodes, and then actually wrote each script. And rewrote it. It took many hours, but at the end of the summer, I was finished with the script for the series.

Which leads directly into the most difficult part of my Capstone, bringing the script to life. For that, I'd need actors, sound effects, and music. Luckily, with the help of some wonderful and talented individuals, I managed to get all three. My first task was to cast the five main roles.. There were many other speaking roles, but these were fairly minor, and I figured that I could get my friends to perform them. The project hinged on the five main roles being played well, and I knew I'd have to find some

extraordinary actors. This presented something of a challenge, as I didn't have any ties to either the local acting community or Syracuse University's Drama department. Three of the characters: Thompson, Cres, and Tal, were younger, and could be played by college-aged actors. The other two main characters, Rial and San, were older, and I wanted older actors to play them. I certainly didn't want a college-aged actor to put on a gruff voice to play the part – there was no way the audience wouldn't pick up on that.

I started the casting process by focusing on the three younger parts. I contacted Syracuse Drama department and asked them if I could send a casting call through their department's listserv. They agreed, and soon an email message asking for interested actors was in the inbox of every Syracuse student that was majoring in Drama. I got a fairly good response, with nine people agreeing to audition. I set up an audition space in an empty studio, placed a recorder, and conducted auditions. The very first audition was with Kristal Carter, who read for both Cres and Tal. She absolutely blew me away with her interpretation of Cres; she brought exactly the right amount of grit and determination to the role. She was perfect for it, and I absolutely knew from the first moment that I would cast her. The other batch of auditions went well, each actor was professional and did a solid read of their respective part. But no one jumped out at me like Kristal did. So, I cast Kristal, and no one else. Most likely, not the wisest decision I've ever made, but I knew that the actors would be

extremely important to 'Transmission', and I didn't want to settle for simple competence or professionalism. Part of the reason 'The War of the Worlds' is so effective is the fact that the actors completely inhabited their respective characters. Without visuals, the actor's voice is the only thing about a character that a listener can latch onto, so the performance is immeasurably important.

Luckily for me, almost immediately after I decided not to cast the parts of Thompson and Tal from the audition, I was introduced to two people that were perfect for the roles. I met Daniel Powell at a premiere party for a web series, and we immediately hit it off, talking about the power of aural storytelling and bemoaning the lack of good American radio drama. I noticed that Daniel had exactly the voice quality I was looking for, and so I brought up the fact that I was making 'Transmission', and was looking for someone to voice the main character. He was interested, and after I sent him the script, he agreed to play Thompson. As for Tal's part, Douglas Quin (my capstone advisor, who I'll be talking about later once I get to the acknowledgements) had introduced me to Sydney Steinberg, because we were both interested in working for 'This American Life'. We hit it off, and became friends. Gradually, I noticed that she had the excitable, curious quality I was looking for in Tal. I talked to her about 'Transmission', and she thought it was an interesting project; I asked her if she'd consider playing Tal, and she said yes.

Now, I recognize that I was and am extraordinarily lucky. I did not audition either Sydney or Daniel, they just had a quality I was looking for and were excited about the project. The reason I didn't do another set of auditions, or simply settle on a competent Drama Department actor in the first place, was because I wanted to be blown away. I wanted to be excited by the actors I worked with, and I wanted them to be excited about 'Transmission'. Both Daniel and Sydney are interested in sound design and aural storytelling, so this project was right up their alley. Indeed, part of the reason Kristal stood out to me was her genuine interest in the science-fiction aspects of the project. I took the riskier option, and I'm glad I did, Daniel and Sydney were both absolutely perfect for their roles.

After casting the three younger parts, it was time to find older actors to play Rial and San, the two leaders of the nomadic tribe Thompson journeys with. Thanks to Brett Barry, this turned out to be surprisingly easy. I mentioned the fact that I needed older actors to Brett, an accomplished voice actor and producer, and he got me in touch with Bruce Coville, who runs a company called 'Full Cast Audio'. I emailed him hoping to get the contact information of some local actors. But after talking about the project and the part of Rial, Bruce expressed interest in playing the part himself. I arranged an interview with Bruce at his house, which was coincidentally right across the street from mine. After talking with him for a couple minutes (and learning that he was also the author of the 'I Was A Sixth Grade Alien' book series, which I had devoured in elementary

school) I knew his gravelly voice was perfect for Rial. He also got me in touch with Katie Gibson, a local actress who Bruce assured me would be perfect for the role of San. I emailed her, she was interested in the part, and based upon Bruce Coville's recommendation, I cast her sight unseen, or rather, voice unheard.

But before I could start recording, I received extremely good news: I had been given a Crown Wise Award of \$1700 for my Capstone Project. This enabled me to pay the actors and the composer I was working with, and ensured that I'd get top quality work on both counts. (I'll go into further detail about the music later in this essay.) Having the money allowed me to schedule longer recording sessions with all the actors and make more demands of their time. So when I started scheduling sessions, I was in a very advantageous position.

I split the script into three parts: Thompson's narration, scenes with the young actors, and scenes with both the younger and older actors. I booked studio time in the Newhouse studios, and rented out a sound device and a Neuman microphone. I chose the Neuman because it gives a very full quality to dialogue and has a good omni-directional option, which is useful when all the actors are standing around one microphone. I then started to record Daniel performing Thompson's narration. I chose to record his narration in one fell swoop because I wanted the narration to sound a bit removed from the action of each episode. I wanted a clear separation between narration and action so as not to confuse the listener.

The narration recording sessions went very smoothly, with Daniel absolutely nailing the performance.

I then arranged a recording session with all five main actors. It was a bit chaotic, with all five of them there and gathered around the microphone, but it worked wonderfully. I chose to do just a couple of long takes of scenes, to give a sense of flow and realism to each performance, and to let the actors react to each other. Every single performance was absolutely astounding. I'm hugely indebted to each actor, and I'm very glad I cast each one. After that recording session, I was left with the young actors' dialogue to record. This took a while to accomplish, both because of the large amount of dialogue, and because I had to cast minor parts for smaller scenes. These were parts such as "villager #1", but they were important to give the piece a sense of verisimilitude and make the world seem large and expansive. For these minor parts, I cast people I knew. Fortunately a few friends had some theater experience and were happy to help (Brett Barry for one, was wonderful in the role of an evil "barbarian" commander). But eventually, these recordings were finished. Aside from some minor scheduling difficulties that are always endemic to a project of this nature, they went smoothly as could be hoped. With that, one of the most important aspects of 'Transmission', the dialogue, was finished.

And it was finished just in time for Winter Break, so I spent the vacation picking the best takes and constructing a dialogue-only version of 'Transmission'. I was tempted to chop up each line of dialogue,

lengthening or shortening pauses until I got exactly the take I wanted, but I decided against it. I chose to trust in the actors' performances, and work with what I was given. An actor's performance is a creative act in and of itself, and they each brought aspects to their characters that I wasn't expecting. So except for taking out machine noise or rustling sounds, I tried my best not to alter each take. It was also more in keeping with the traditions of old radio serials, giving the dialogue an almost "live" quality.

With that done, I moved to sound effects, one of the most important parts of the entire project. I made a list of every sound effect that I thought should be in 'Transmission', which turned out to be an absolutely gigantic list, with exactly 354 separate sounds. I also made a list of the ambient sounds I needed, stuff like 'desert winds', 'cavernous ruins', and 'village tents'. I knew that unless I had ambient beds, everything would sound like it was recorded in a studio. (It was, but I certainly didn't want it to sound like it.) The ambient beds would locate scenes in the world of 'Transmission'.

After making these lists, I set about collecting sounds. I did this in three ways. Firstly, Douglas Quin gave me access to his massive sound archive of field recordings, and let me use sound that he had collected in his travels. His library had some wonderful nature sounds that would have been extremely difficult to find otherwise; sounds like: galloping horses, which I used to create the sound of the barbarian's steeds, various fires, which I used to create, you guessed it, the sound of campfires, and a tent

flapping in the arctic wind, which I used to create the sound of a landship sailing in the desert. In short, Professor Quin's library was a huge help. The second way I collected sounds was by finding creative commons sound effects on the internet. I tried not to do too much of this, but there were some instances in which it was necessary. For example, the sounds of an electrical system shorting out, sparks flying, or landship construction would have been needlessly difficult and time-consuming to make on my own. The third, and most important way I collected sounds, was by creating them myself. I wanted the majority of sounds in 'Transmission' to be of my own devising, so that I could make *exactly* the sound that I wanted. So I miked myself walking along a semi-secluded beach to get the sound of footsteps in the desert. I rustled a thin blanket to make the sound of a tent flap opening. I banged a metal closet to create the sound of monsters straining at an enormous metal door. There's a scene in which Cres cuts the head off of one of these metal monsters; to make that sound, I cut at a watermelon with a large knife, and then scraped around inside the watermelon to get some wonderful squelching sounds. To create the cries and groans of the technology monsters, Chris Baugh (the man responsible for the project's music) and I screamed and groaned into a microphone for about an hour, trying to sound bestial. After that, Chris processed these screams and added a variety of effects in an effort to make the cries sound mechanical. This marriage of human voice and

mechanization fit in with the themes of technological overdependence I was trying to convey, and also worked well as creepy monster screams.

Creating sound effects was one of the most enjoyable parts of the entire project, and it gave me a sense of connection to the old foley artists of the 1930s and 40s. In addition to creating the sound effects, I also edited them, giving them reverb, pitch-shifting, or messing with their EQ, all to make them sound as exciting and present as possible. I wasn't aiming for realism, I wanted the sound effects to be a bit exaggerated, to highlight them and to connect with the listener on a more visceral level.

This leads me to one of the most important ways 'Transmission' will connect with its audience: music. I actually debated whether to include music in my piece. In the original conception of "found sound", there would be absolutely no sound that wasn't recorded by Thompson himself. But as the project moved beyond its original conceit, I realized that music would be important, necessary in fact, to propel the story along. In old radio serials, music serves a vital role in heightening every aspect of the show. I wanted to continue on in the tradition of the old serials, and to do that, I knew I needed music. Luckily, I happen to be very good friends with an extremely talented producer and composer, Chris Baugh (mentioned above). He was one of the very first people I talked to about the project, and he was interested from the get go. I didn't even consider anyone else, Chris is able to write and perform an extremely wide variety of music, meaning he was perfect for a project that demands many different styles

and types of accompaniment. He also happens to be my roommate, which meant we could work very closely together to marry the music and sound. And because of the Crown Wise Award, it wasn't simply a favor for a friend; he was able to spend much of his time working on 'Transmission'.

Because the music would take a long time to make, we started early, almost as soon as I finished the scripts. I went over some general themes I wanted him to compose, including 'action', 'travel', 'mystery', and an opening and closing theme song. Chris created these themes, and after I played the dialogue-only draft of 'Transmission', he further refined them. Once I had finished all aspects of the production except the music, we worked together to marry the sound effects, dialogue, and music. We made sure to keep the mix clear, so that the music didn't overpower everything else. But as it stands now, the music adds a wonderful element to 'Transmission', and I can't imagine the piece without Chris's contributions.

This leads to the immense amount of help and guidance I've received during the course of this project. I'm the writer, producer, editor, and director of 'Transmission', but I wouldn't have been able to create this piece at all without some truly amazing people. First and foremost is Douglas Quin, my Capstone advisor. He has been extremely generous with both his time and resources, giving me both essential advice in the project's construction and access to his personal sound archive. I know that this project would be immeasurably worse if not for him. I would also

like to thank my honors reader, Jennifer Doctor, who has taken time out of her busy schedule to give me advice and encouragement on this project. The honors faculty and staff were also wonderful, and the project would not have been nearly as good if not for the generous Crown Wise Award. Next up are the actors. Daniel Powell, Kristal Carter, Sydney Steinberg, Bruce Coville, and Katie Gibson all did an absolutely stellar job. They brought their characters to life, and without them, 'Transmission' would ring hollow. There were other actors as well, friends who played smaller roles, but made the world of 'Transmission' bigger. They were: Chris Baugh, David Faes, Ethan Rose, Brett Barry, Peter Xavier, Matthew Koslow, Cassandra Baim, Leanne Abraham, Jeanette Wall, Marina Zarya, and Sam Kogan. I truly appreciate them lending me their valuable time. Mary Castellanos, Kaylee Karlick, and Kirsten Celo all helped me gather sound effects, with Kirsten traveling with me all the way to Green Lakes to collect the sound of sandy footsteps. I don't know how I would have gotten some of the sound effects without them. Marina Zarya has been immensely helpful in designing the website and drawing logos and artwork for 'Transmission'. As a purely audio work, the few visuals associated with the series are extremely important, and Marina has outdone herself. Finally, I can't even imagine 'Transmission' without its music, and that's entirely due to the extraordinary work of Chris Baugh. He has spent an immense amount of time on this project, and it shows. I truly appreciate it.

Without everyone's help, there's no way 'Transmission' could have been made, and I hope that the show lives up to their generous investment.

And that's 'Transmission'. I believe that it continues in the tradition of old radio, while showing that aural storytelling has a place in the modern world. And by podcasting 'Transmission', I hope that people outside of Honors, and outside of Syracuse, will be able to see that. Or, more accurately, hear that.

Summary of Capstone Project

For my honors capstone project, I have produced 'Transmission', a ten episode audio drama to be released via podcast. What exactly does this mean? Imagine a television show, like 'Lost', each episode has its own plot and storyline, but taken together, the episodes work to form an entire piece of art, building off one another as a continuous story. Now, take away all the visuals, so you're just left with the audio: the actor's dialogue, the music, and the sound effects. That's it! That's 'Transmission' in a nutshell. Of course, it's more complicated than that. Television and radio are entirely different beasts, with completely different vocabularies and delivery methods. I'll be going over those complexities in this essay, but if you're ever confused, just remember: 'Transmission' is like a TV show with only sound.

You might be surprised to know, but audio storytelling actually has a long tradition. Removing discussion of early homo-sapiens telling stories by the fire (suffice to say, I think that part of the reason people respond so strongly to storytelling via sound is that it ties us back to an oral tradition that's deeply ingrained in our human identity), radio storytelling has been around since the first days of radio, in the 1920s. Before both television and the advent of portable radio sets, the radio served as a family gathering place. Children would lie in front of it, parents would sit on their armchairs near it, all experiencing a window to a world of music, art, news, culture, and stories that would have been almost unimaginable to previous

generations. In the 1930s and 40s, the so-called 'golden age', radio was home to sitcoms, anthology series, and dramas...most every modern television genre has its roots in radio. Transmission takes its inspiration from shows like "The Shadow", "Dragnet", and the radio version of "Superman". Shows like these were serialized adventure stories, with cliffhangers and exciting action scenes created solely through the use of voice, sound effects, and music. These types of shows died out in America (there's still plenty of wonderful audio storytelling happening at the BBC...but that's not the purview of this summary) with the advent of television, but 'Transmission' serves as a proof of concept. My intent is for this series to prove that radio storytelling can be vital, engaging, and most of all, fun, in the modern era. But 'Transmission' won't be released over the airwaves to awaiting radios; no, each episode of 'Transmission' will be released via podcast.

Now, what's a podcast, you might ask? It's simple. A podcast is a free downloadable audio program that you can listen to on your computer or mp3 player. You can subscribe to a podcast via iTunes or other internet sources, meaning that you automatically download each new episode as it comes out. So, it's like a radio show, but a radio show that you can save and listen to whenever you want. Podcasts are the perfect accompaniment for working out or enduring a long commute. To make 'Transmission' a podcast, I'll simply create a website, post each episode, and sync the website to iTunes so people can download it. Easy.

But what's *in* 'Transmission'? Why would people want to listen to it?

There are ten episodes to 'Transmission', each about fifteen minutes in length. The plot of 'Transmission' involves Henry Thompson, the protagonist and narrator, a lone astronaut who finds himself stranded on an alien world. At first, is completely alone, but soon discovers that the planet is both inhabited and post-apocalyptic, with tribes of nomadic, human-like creatures moving through the ruins of a once great civilization. Thompson journeys with one of the alien tribes, meeting fascinating characters, including Cres, a headstrong warrior, Rial, a shaman with a dark past, San, a no-nonsense leader, and Tal, an excitable and curious villager. Eventually, he must uncover the mystery of what happened to this alien world, while also surviving the many dangers that lurk in the ruins.

People will want to listen to it, because 'Transmission' is exciting and action-packed, full of suspense and danger. It has a driving plot, complex characters, and it introduces viewers to a strange alien world of mystery and wonder. And because 'Transmission' will be a series of podcasts, listeners can take the shows with them, listening to them whenever they want. It'll make a subway commute go by so much faster.

'Transmission' is also fully voiced by truly talented actors. My script called for five main roles, three young and two old, and each actor was absolutely wonderful. (You might be wondering how there are four other voice roles if Henry Thompson is the only human in the cast. That would be because he had an interpreter chip installed in his brain before he left

earth. It's science-fiction.) For the young parts Daniel Powell, a graduate student focused on sound, gave Thompson a wonderfully nervous quality. Sydney Steinberg, a senior TRF major, was the perfect choice for Tal's excitable nature. And Kristal Carter, a VPA acting major, completely embodied Cres's warrior spirit. For the parts that need older actors, I was extremely lucky in casting. My Capstone Advisor (the wonderful Professor Quin) got me in contact with Bruce Coville, who in addition to being a great children's book writer (I devoured his "I Was A Sixth Grade Alien" series when I was little), also runs Full Cast Audio, which is a company that produces fully voiced audiobooks and audio dramas. In addition to completely inhabiting Rial's unique combination of wisdom and curiosity, he got me in contact with another actor, Katie Gibson, who gave San an extraordinary confidence. Suffice to say, they each gave an amazing performance, brining their characters to life.

In addition I designed sound effects for 'Transmission', creating a believable world for those characters to live in. Whether it was slicing up cabbage and watermelon to mimic the sound of the heroes cutting the head off of the evil monsters they're facing, waving a blanket around to create the sound of a tent flap opening, or whipping a bullroarer to embody the sound of Cres's sling, the sound effects I created are a vital part of 'Transmission', akin to the visuals of a television show. But just as important as the acting and sound effects is the music, which was composed and performed by Christopher Baugh, a talented and

accomplished electronic musician. His music is an integral part of 'Transmission', as it gives the program a sense of flow and heightens the emotion of each scene.

In summation, I hope you now have a better understanding of what 'Transmission' is, and what I'm trying to do with it. As a serialized audio drama, I hope to prove that radio storytelling can be just as artful and exciting in the modern era as it was in the golden age of American radio. And once you hear 'Transmission', I believe you'll agree with me.