

2010

Strongest

Michael Auritt

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Strongest
Michael Auritt
MFA Live-Action Production
School of Film and Animation
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
11/17/10

Thesis Committee:

Howard Lester, Thesis Chair

Geoffrey Alan Rhodes

Charles Bandla

Abstract:

“Strongest” is a short film, produced in the School of Film and Animation at RIT. It is a science-fiction film noir about a woman, Rose, who is searching for her husband. In the process of searching for him, she uncovers his dark secrets and strange scientific experiments. The film was shot almost exclusively using a greenscreen with backgrounds and other effects being placed in post-production. This manuscript examines the filmmaking process from script writing to shooting to completed film. During the stages of preproduction, production, and post-production many challenges were faced. Some of these challenges were overcome to produce quality work. Others, led to mistakes which prevented “Strongest” from reaching it’s full potential. Greenscreen footage was not always captured properly which added hours of extra work to the post-production process and made achieving a fully-integrated style difficult and, in some cases, impossible. However, because of these mistakes, valuable lessons could be taken away in order to avoid problems on future films. These lessons include screenwriting techniques, proper greenscreen procedures, and the use of post-production tools. Whatever the film’s flaws, “Strongest” was a success in terms of the knowledge that was gained to avoid problems on future projects.

It is always interesting to look back on the beginning of a creative project. Very often, the initial spark of such a work bears little or no resemblance to the final product. An artistic work tends to begin as a near limitless field of choices. The creative process then, is not simply a matter of creating an idea then bringing it into reality. Rather, it is a process of eliminating possibilities, until a final product emerges.

Filmmaking is somewhat unique among the art forms in that the preproduction, production, post-production model allows the artist for three distinct sets of conceptions about the final product. This is certainly the case for my film, “Strongest”. Each stage of production forced me to reevaluate what I saw as the final film. I was constantly rethinking what I could and could not do based on the limitations of story, production, and the footage that I had shot.

Looking back, I feel that I have come a long way from the filmmaker that I was when “Strongest” first popped into my head. I have learned a great deal in the making of my thesis film and this is mostly due to the large number of mistakes that I made. I came onto the project with ideas about how I should proceed and what techniques I should use. More often than not, these ideas required correction, sometimes beforehand and sometimes afterwards. But this is the way that the learning process must proceed. Without mistakes, I may have ended up with a better film, but I can’t say that I would have learned nearly as much.

To me “Strongest” has become my most complete and satisfying screenplay. It is the screenplay that taught me how to write screenplays. But I did not know that would be the case at the time I started writing it. As it turns out, the journey from initial idea to final form was to be a long and often frustrating road.

The original story for “Strongest” bears little resemblance to what ultimately became the final film. The first germ of an idea came in the form of a man who was so strong that he could not do anything without damaging the objects and people around him. The film itself starts with Rose, a woman who lost her husband in a robbery that also left her son paralyzed. Desperate to cheer up her son, she searches out his boyhood hero, the strong man. Now an outcast, he is eventually redeemed through Rose and sacrifices himself to save the world.

The idea of superhuman powers as a stigma is certainly nothing new, but it is one that I find interesting and worth further exploration. Beyond that, I found the image of a freakishly large, ultra-strong man to be very cinematic and a technical challenge to pull off. But the story itself fell flat. The character that I had created for the strong man had no life to him and was simply a way to get his physical nature onto the screen. This presented quite a challenge for me as a writer and it took a great many rewrites to work through. Every attempt that I made at creating a straightforward and coherent screenplay just made things more jumbled and contrived.

The story finally began to gel when I started thinking not just of a man whose strength made him an outcast, but a man who actively sought out that strength, without regard for what it might do to himself or to those around him. Stephen began to take shape: a man so twisted by his desire for vengeance that it ends up consuming his humanity. The character of Rose, who in the original story had been a mother looking for a heroic figure for her paralyzed son, now became a wife trying to find her husband. Again, this gave Rose an actual physical goal rather than a conceptual one. This became the first of many lessons I was to learn while working on “Strongest”.

It is not enough to simply say that a character wants something. In my acting classes I was taught to always ask the question, “What do the characters in the scene want from each other?” Once this question is answered, everything that character does and says can be focused through their objective. I have seen a performance completely altered by the simple addition of a goal. This is an immensely clarifying thing for a director to discover and it has been a great tool in working with my actors. But I have found it to be an even greater tool as a writer.

Too often I have attempted to intellectualize my way through a script. I have relied too heavily on the underlying themes of my script to carry the story and characters. My previous film, “The Sweaty Man”, is a perfect example of this shortcoming. It is a film about a contract killer, Muck, whose constant sweating isolates him from the rest of the world. The overarching concept of the piece was that everyone saw the killer as a monster, so he behaved like one. In principle I feel that this is a compelling theme for a film and one that is worth exploring. In execution however, I tried to shoehorn it into every bit of dialogue in the film. Every character spoke and acted as a way of delivering the idea that Muck was a monster to the audience. As a result, every scene was seemed contrived and carried no tension or emotion.

When it came time to write “Strongest” I continued to make the same mistakes. Even after simplifying the plot, I was still stuck in my own intellectual ideas of how I wanted the characters to act. This led me through more drafts than I can recall, each one taking me no further towards a workable screenplay. What finally took me to the finished version was to forget about everything except what the characters wanted. All of my ideas about the nature of revenge and the quest for power; my clumsy attempts to

move the plot along; my desire to have everything wrapped up in nice, neat conclusion; all of these issues resolved themselves when I focused on the rather simple question of motivation.

This was not an easy lesson to learn and I struggled for quite a while on a few elements that were preventing me from finalizing the script. Foremost among these elements, was the ending. All throughout the writing process, I had one ending in mind: Rose would meet the detectives in the alley and tell them everything that had happened. This seemed like the perfect conclusion to the film. Rose would have her mystery solved, the detectives would have the answers they were looking for, Snyte would be dead, and the night would be over. Except that this ending never satisfied me. It was never really earned by the rest of the screenplay and felt tacked on. I had a desire for a neatly wrapped up ending, but hadn't written a story that could support one. Eventually, I discovered that by ending the film a scene earlier, I had a much more powerful conclusion. Rose would pass out in the alley and the film would be over. Was she dreaming? Did she actually see Stephen? These questions would be left unanswered for the audience, just as they are unanswered for Rose. She has made her discovery and seen the darkness within Stephen, and that is really what the film is all about. After that development, the last few elements of the screenplay came together and I could finally move into production.

In watching the final version of "Strongest" it becomes obvious that I had a lot to learn about shooting in front of a greenscreen. With the exception of a few small class assignments, I had never done any extensive greenscreen work. As a result, I made some mistakes in the production process, mistakes that would cost me quite a bit of time and

energy during post-production. But with those mistakes came a great many lessons in greenscreen technique and workflow. By seeing how and why my chroma keys were or were not working, I gained a much better understanding of how such a production should proceed.

The main source of my greenscreen difficulty stems from the choices I made with regard to lighting. My intention was to shoot “Strongest” as a film noir. Wherever possible I wanted to have the main action of the scene lit with a single light and have the rest shrouded in darkness. This approach worked fine for the shots that had no greenscreen in them, but led to trouble with those that did. Greenscreen scenes were lit as they would have been in a traditional film. The greenscreens, however, were brightly lit so that they could be properly seen and removed in post.

Upon reviewing the footage, it quickly became clear that this approach would not lead to a clean greenscreen removal. The dim foreground against the bright green background led to a large amount of green spill onto the actors. This resulted in jagged edges on the actors, inconsistencies with the mattes, and a green tint to everything that was shot.

Were I to shoot everything over again, I would have done a number of things differently in order to prevent such a large amount of spill. First, my approach to lighting the scenes would have been completely different. Rather than attempting the final look of the film on set with high contrast lighting, I would have opted for a much more even lighting scheme. The high contrast look that I was aiming for could have been achieved later in post and the green light from the background would not have been so overwhelming. Second, I would have moved the actors further away from the screen

whenever possible to minimize reflected green light. Third, I would have chosen my character's clothing more carefully. I would favor darker, less reflective clothing. The scene in which Rose is brought into Snyte's office was a particular challenge due to the white sweater that she is wearing. Not only did the white of the sweater add to the spill, but the fuzziness of the material also made it difficult to maintain clean edges. Rose's hair was also a problem but there was not as much that could be done about that.

Other mistakes were made as well regarding the visual effects due to my lack of experience. I had initially attempted to create tracking points on the greenscreens for later match-move effects. But these points ended up being too thick and not placed well enough. When it came time to track them, it proved difficult to do so using the available software. In addition, they were not always easy to eliminate and often had to be masked out with animated shapes.

It would seem that the bulk of my difficulties in post were the result of my assumption that anything could be fixed later on in the computer. I have done some effects work in short classroom assignments and thus believed that I knew enough to essentially do whatever I wanted in post-production. I did not have enough appreciation for the amount of time and attention to detail it would take fix all of these problems in a consistent and convincing manner. It had also been my assumption that committing to a more "stylized" look for "Strongest" would allow me the ability to cover up any flaws by simply incorporating them into the look of the film. What I did not anticipate was that these flaws would be a roadblock towards achieving a consistent style. Every effect and filter that I applied could have a vastly different result from shot to shot depending on

which flaws were present. So each shot required a great deal of extra work to make it conform to the rest of the scene.

With production completed, decisions had to be made as to how “Strongest” would be put together into a completed film. The aforementioned mistakes made during shooting would set limits on what could and could not be done with the footage I had. The first stylistic choice would be a shift to high-contrast black and white. This had not been a part of my original conception of the film, but fit well with the film noir lighting and mystery plot. It also eliminated some of the problems with green spill. Beyond that, it quickly became obvious that using as much black space as possible to hide jagged edges, visible tracking points, greenscreen gaps, etc would speed up the process of correcting my mistakes.

To that end, there was a small set of tools that I learned to use repeatedly to increase the amount of shadow in any given shot. There was extensive use of animated masks and shapes to take care of elements outside of the desired image area. I learned to find the most efficient shapes and motion paths to eliminate unwanted artifacts without infringing on the actors. Vignettes on individual layers often proved useful for eliminating or blurring rough edges and for blending foreground and background objects. Backgrounds were made to include as few elements as possible. This allowed me to reduce the number of shots in which the foreground needed to match with the background. It is much easier to place a chroma-keyed layer in front of darkness than a background with its own movements and lighting considerations. This also gelled with my interest in creating a film noir atmosphere in which characters are surrounded by darkness.

In terms of “Strongest” as whole work, I not sure if all of the elements ever came together completely. When production began, I had a very clear style in mind for the film. But the footage that I was left with, would not allow me to bring that vision into reality. Instead, the mistakes of production led me towards a look that exploited visual flaws and didn’t focus on realism. The problem with this approach is that what worked on one scene, or even one shot, would not necessarily work on any other part of the film. This led to a kind of mishmash of styles that prevented all the elements of the film from being fully integrated. While I think that the approach of increasing the negative aspects of the film was the right way to go, the fact that my techniques are so inconsistent will make it difficult for the audience to discern my intentions. In much of the film, the mistakes are obvious without the look of the film being apparent. It also detracts from the acting and story that I took so much time to put together.

Were I to make “Strongest” over again, I would put a great deal more thought into post-production. I have a much greater understanding of the tools at my disposal, now. I am much more aware of their strengths, limitations, and how they can best be implemented. On future projects I will be able to know what tools I will want to use ahead of time so as to optimize my production techniques. I will also be aware of the importance of getting everything right on set. When you’re in the middle of production and rushing to get everything shot, it’s very easy to say, “I’ll just fix it in post”. Throughout the post-production process, I grew to regret that phrase. If nothing else I have a better appreciation for the amount of work that greenscreen post-production can lead to.

In the end, "Strongest" is what it is: a lot of interesting ideas that were never fully integrated. But I look forward to future projects where I can put everything that I have learned to good use. Many mistakes were made, but I have learned from them. As I move on from my time with "Strongest", that seems like the most important thing. The process has not always been easy, but the lessons that I have walked away were more than worth it.

TREATMENT

A man sits in a dark lab, surrounded by machines. He has attached sensors to his head. He sits in a wheelchair. His name is Stephen and when he pulls a large switch, he disappears.

His wife, Rose, sits at home, writing. The phone rings, causing Rose to spill her ink. On the phone is Dr. Snyte, Stephen's supervisor. He needs to see Rose right away.

Meanwhile, a robbery is stopped when its perpetrator has his head crushed by a giant fist. The police arrive just in time to see a large figure disappear into the night.

Rose finds Snyte in his office. He is just about to swallow some pills. Rose wants to know where Stephen is. Snyte wants the same thing.

Back at the crime scene, two detectives try to make sense of mayhem in front of them. They get word of another vigilante murder. Forensics is scraping two would-be rapists off the pavement.

Snyte makes Rose some coffee. He wants to know what Stephen has been up to. But Rose hasn't seen much of her husband since he was attacked last year. He's been working in his lab almost every night.

She notices a book on Snyte's desk. It's Stephen's journal. Snyte had been reading it, looking for an answer. Rose looks through it. It's a jumbled mess of nonsense and ideas that go nowhere.

Rose gets up to leave. She wants to go to the police. But as she rises, she stumbles. She is falling asleep fast. Snyte lets her fall to the couch. As she drifts off, he grabs her keys.

The two detectives interview the woman who was almost raped. She says that some kind of giant killed her assailant.

Rose wakes up. She is alone and decides to look through Stephen's lab. There, she stumbles upon a book just like the one Snyte had. The writing is clear and well ordered, the complete opposite of the journal Snyte had been looking through. This is Stephen's actual journal.

She also finds a small, awkwardly made robot the size of cat. It springs to life, but struggles to move. Rose runs out of the lab and right into Snyte. He was afraid she had left. Rose spots ink on his hands.

She makes an excuse and moves quickly to the door and out onto the street.

Rose walks quickly away from the building. Snyte pulls her into an alley. He wants to know what Stephen did.

Behind him, the figure of a large man drops silently out of the sky.

Snyte tries to strangle Rose, but is crushed by the giant creature.

The Figure looms over Rose as she tries to comprehend the last few moments of her life. She is lost in a fog of pain and confusion. It moves forward into the light in a single massive motion. It's not a living creature but anger and vengeance forged into mechanical parts and animated with some unknown power. The worst thoughts of a tortured man made real in gigantic and distorted dimensions.

Rose pushes herself to her feet and stares into the two white glowing lights that approximate eyes. Her face is bloody. She doesn't blink, she doesn't run, and she doesn't take her eyes off the thing in front of her.

The giant's hand comes up close to Rose's face. She looks down to Snyte, then back up at the figure. She backs away. Step by step she distances herself. The Figure waits, but doesn't try to stop her. She's not coming back. The figure crouches down, then launches into the air, disappearing. A loud thud can be heard from him landing onto one of the buildings. Rose is alone.

The alley is now a crime scene. Rose is there with the two detectives. She hands them Stephen's journal. She doesn't want to know what it says. As far as she is concerned, her husband is dead.

Rose walks away. In the distance behind her a tiny figure moves from rooftop to rooftop.

APPROACH

Creating Stephen's Creature:

The biggest concern that I have with *Strongest* is that the large "creature" which the film centers around needs to look as real as possible. I am fully aware that anything less than perfect will come across as unconvincing, silly, and even laughable. I take this responsibility very seriously.

So, how will I create this creature?

I am not interested in using a computer-generated character. CG characters rarely look convincing even in the largest, most expensive films. I believe the key to this creature lies in two potential techniques:

1. Create a stop-motion puppet to be composited into the scene.
2. Create a life-size puppet to be manipulated on set.

I may use only one of these methods or use them in conjunction (possibly supplemented by CG enhancements) and I am currently exploring their relative pros and cons. The important thing is that, if done well, either of these techniques will provide me with the tactile reality that is usually lacking in CG creations. I first decided I wanted to make films after watching Robocop fight ED-209 and I expect to have a great deal of fun in attempting to live up to that extremely high bar.

At the same time, I will look for ways to "hide" the creature in the scenes that it appears. Through the use of shadows, well-planned composition, and editing

techniques, I hope to create the impression that the audience is seeing more than they actually are. This is a being that belongs to the shadows and I see it as something that is mostly seen in quick glimpses or in silhouette. A darker image will also make any potential compositing simpler to pull off. This is consistent with my plans for the look and shooting style of *Strongest*.

Style:

The creation of a consistent and believable world is crucial to the success of any film. But this becomes especially important when dealing with science fiction. In my time at RIT I have constantly tried to develop a mature and unique style for my films. There have been moments in my work when I feel that I have succeeded and others when I feel that I have failed. In either situation I took the opportunity to learn from experience and make adjustments in subsequent projects. I have also been using my time to study those films that I wish to emulate in my own work. To a large extent, this means films from the 1940's and 50's.

Strongest is a film noir. Rose will journey into a world of mystery and deceit. With its heavy shadows and distorted view of the world, noir is the perfect choice and has grown to be my favorite genre. It is the genre in which I plan to spend most of my creative energy.

This choice will also aide me in developing the world of *Strongest* while keeping the film within its budget without sacrificing on set design. I am very interested in doing something along the lines of *Citizen Kane*. By including a few key

details while implying the rest with shadows or composting, I intend to create the world of *Strongest*. A world that occupies its own reality yet stays believable.

Marketing & Distribution:

Once *Strongest* is completed and ready for viewing, there are several avenues that I will pursue in order to get it seen by as many people as possible.

First and foremost in this effort will be my use of a Creative Commons license. This license provides a clear and simple way for me to encourage the sharing of my work. More importantly, using Creative Commons automatically includes me in a growing community of artists and consumers of art. It will allow my film to be listed in search engines and included on web sites dedicated exclusively to Creative Commons work. As a filmmaker and as a consumer I have come to believe very strongly in Creative Commons and see it as a crucial tool for artists to take control of how their work is used.

In conjunction with the Creative Commons I intend to take advantage of sites such as YouTube and Vimeo as well as my own web site to display *Strongest* as widely as possible. This site will also allow me to provide free, high quality downloads of *Strongest* and establish a system for accepting donations to fund future projects. I do not necessarily expect to see much immediate money from this technique but I believe that as future projects are created and distributed this may become a viable method for funding.

Film festivals will be my main method for moving beyond a general audience and connecting directly with filmmakers and others in the industry. I will submit *Strongest* to as many festivals as possible while also seeking out those festivals specifically geared towards relevant genres and categories.

I will use a set photographer in order to create a professional press kit and other promotional materials. This will allow me to distribute postcard, fliers, etc at festivals and other events as well as encourage those festivals to which “Strongest” is accepted to use my materials in their own promotional material. In addition, I will use the skills I have learned at RIT to create a dynamic and professional DVD for free distribution and possible sale.

TIMELINE

	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	BEYOND
WRITING	XXX	XXX									
CASTING	XXX	XXX	XXX								
CREW	XXX	XXX	XXX								
STORYBOARDS	XXX	XXX	XXX								
LOCATIONS	XXX	XXX	XXX								
PRODUCTION DESIGN	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX							
REHEARSALS			XXX	XXX							
SHOOTING				XXX	XXX	XXX					
EDITING						XXX	XXX	XXX			
COMPOSITING						XXX	XXX	XXX			
SOUND							XXX	XXX			
COMPLETION									XXX		
DVD									XXX	XXX	
FESTIVALS										XXX	XXXXXX

CREDIT DISTRIBUTION

QUARTER	CREDIT HOURS
FALL	4
WINTER	4
SPRING	4

BUDGET

Budget:	\$4,197.50			Start Date:	Sep-09
Thesis Chair:	Howard Lester			End Date:	May-10
				Running Time:	10 minutes
				Format:	HD
SUMMARY BUDGET					
01-00 Script					\$0.00
02-00 Producers Unit					\$0.00
03-00 Direction					\$0.00
04-00 Cast					\$0.00
				TOTAL ABOVE-THE-LINE	\$0.00
05-00 Production Staff					\$0.00
06-00 Extra Talent					\$0.00
07-00 Production Design					\$100.00
08-00 Set Operations					\$300.00
09-00 Set Dressing					\$500.00
10-00 Property					\$1,300.00
11-00 Wardrobe					\$400.00
12-00 Make-Up and Hirdressing					\$200.00
13-00 Electrical					\$0.00
14-00 Camera					\$0.00
15-00 Sound					\$50.00
16-00 Transportation					\$150.00
17-00 Loaction Expenses					\$100.00
				TOTAL PRODUCTION	\$3,100.00
18-00 Editorial					\$400.00
19-00 Music					\$0.00
20-00 Post Production Sound					\$50.00
21-00 Graphic Art Work					\$100.00
				TOTAL POST-PRODUCTION	\$550.00
Total Above-The-Line					\$0.00
Total Below-The-Line					\$3,650.00
Total Above and Below-The-Line					\$3,650.00
Contingency @ 15%					\$547.50
GRAND TOTAL					\$4,197.50

					Total
01-00 Script					
01-01 Writer's Salary					\$0.00
01-02 Research					\$0.00
01-03 Script Copying					\$0.00
			Total for 01-00:		\$0.00
02-00 Producers Unit					
02-01 Executive Producer					\$0.00
02-02 Producer					\$0.00
			Total for 02-00:		\$0.00
03-00 Direction					
03-01 Director					\$0.00
			Total for 03-00:		\$0.00
04-00 Cast					
04-01 Lead Actors					
	Rose				\$0.00
	Snyte				\$0.00
	Stephen				\$0.00
	Roark				\$0.00
	Heller				\$0.00
04-02 Additional Actors					
	Robber				\$0.00
	Clerk				\$0.00
	Police Officer				\$0.00
			Total for 04-00:		\$0.00
TOTAL ABOVE-THE-LINE					\$0.00
BELOW-THE-LINE					
05-00 Production Staff					
05-01 First AD					\$0.00
05-02 Production Coordinator					\$0.00
			Total for 05-00:		\$0.00
06-00 Extra Talent					
06-01 Extras					\$0.00
06-02 Extra Casting Fee					\$0.00
			Total for 06-00:		\$0.00

07-00 Production Design				
07-01	Production Designer			\$0.00
07-02	Assistants			\$0.00
07-03	Research/Materials			\$100.00
		Total for 07-00:		\$100.00
08-00 Set Operations				
08-01	First Grip			\$0.00
08-02	Second Grip			\$0.00
08-03	Craft Service			\$300.00
		Total for 08-00:		\$300.00
09-00 Set Dressing				
09-01	Purchases			\$500.00
		Total for 09-00:		\$500.00
10-00 Property				
10-01	Property Master			\$0.00
10-02	Purchases			\$1,000.00
10-03	Rentals			\$300.00
		Total for 10-00:		\$1,300.00
11-00 Wardrobe				
11-01	Costume Designer			\$0.00
11-02	Expendables			\$100.00
11-03	Purchases			\$200.00
11-04	Rentals			\$100.00
		Total for 11-00:		\$400.00
12-00 Make-Up and Hairdressing				
12-01	Key Make-Up Artist			\$0.00
12-03	Purchases			\$200.00
		Total for 12-00:		\$200.00
13-00 Electrical				
13-01	Gaffer			\$0.00
13-02	Rentals			\$0.00
		Total for 13-00:		\$0.00
14-00 Camera				
14-01	Director of Photography			\$0.00
14-02	First AC			\$0.00
14-03	Still Photographer			\$0.00
14-04	Camera Package			\$0.00
14-05	Crane & Dolly Equipment			\$0.00
		Total for 14-00:		\$0.00

15-00 Sound					
15-01 Mixer					\$0.00
15-02 Boom Operator					\$0.00
15-03 Expendables					\$50.00
			Total for 15-00:		\$50.00
16-00 Transportation					
16-01 Gas					\$150.00
			Total for 16-00:		\$150.00
17-00 Location Expenses					
17-01 Permits					\$0.00
17-02 Parking					\$100.00
17-03 Location Site Rental					\$0.00
			Total for 17-00:		\$100.00
18-00 Editorial					
18-01 Editor					\$0.00
18-02 Screening Copies					\$100.00
18-03 Hardrives					\$300.00
			Total for 18-00:		\$400.00
19-00 Music					
19-01 Composer					\$0.00
19-02 Recoding					\$0.00
			Total for 19-00:		\$0.00
20-00 Post Production Sound					
20-01 Conforming					\$0.00
20-02 ADR &Foley					\$50.00
20-03 Foley Artist					\$0.00
20-04 Mix					\$0.00
			Total for 20-00:		\$50.00
21-00 Graphic Art Work					
21-01 Posters					\$100.00
			Total for 21-00:		\$100.00
Contingency @ 15%					\$547.50
Total Above-The-Line					\$0.00
Total Below-The-Line					\$3,650.00
Total Above and Below-The-Line					\$3,650.00

Strongest
(Second Draft)

by
Michael Auritt
(mta7597@rit.edu)

1 EXT. STREET - NIGHT 1

A face: a man named STEPHEN. He is barely conscious. A drop of blood rolls down from his forehead. Then a blow comes, knocking Stephen to the ground. A man is beating him. They are alone on the street.

2 INT. LAB - NIGHT 2

Stephen again. He has a scar now. He sits in a wheelchair.

He attaches some sensors to his head. These sensors are connected through wires to some unknown device hidden in the shadows.

He takes a moment, his breath growing faster. He places his left hand on a large SWITCH. He pauses.

Then he pulls the switch. The room fills with a light intense enough to obscure everything in the room, revealing a pair of EYES watching through the window.

The room goes dark. Stephen is gone. Two small WHITE LIGHTS come to life, hanging in total darkness, eight feet off the ground.

3 TITLE: 3

"Strongest"

4 INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT 4

ROSE works at a desk. Her hand moves quickly, often smudging the ink of her fountain pen. The phone rings, snapping her out of her work and tipping over the bottle of ink. Flustered by the spill, Rose makes it to the phone.

SNYTE (V.O.)

Rose?

ROSE

Yes?

SNYTE

This is Everette Snyte, Rose.

ROSE

Dr. Snyte. I thought you might be-

SNYTE

Have you seen Stephen?

ROSE
No, of course not. He's working.
Isn't he there?

SNYTE
Can you come to the lab? Right
now. It's important.

ROSE
Yes, I can come. I'll come right
away.

Ink drips onto the floor.

5 EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT 5

Rose leaves her apartment building and puts her KEYS in her purse. Police sirens can be heard in the distance.

6 INT. STORE - NIGHT 6

The sirens are loud here and growing louder. The CASHIER is dead from a gunshot wound and the ROBBER runs out the door...

7 EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 7

He makes it to the parking lot but is stopped by a fist the size of a bowling ball. His head collapses into pulp as it hits the brick exterior of the store.

A police cruiser pulls up, illuminating the scene in alternating blue and red light. A large FIGURE is seen for an instant before it disappears into the night.

8 INT. OFFICE - NIGHT 8

Rose finds SNYTE in his office, sitting at his desk. He is right in the middle of taking some pills when he spots Rose. He rises.

SNYTE
Rose, I'm glad you came.

ROSE
Where is Stephen?

SNYTE
Please, have a seat.

ROSE
I came to see my husband. I
thought he was going to be here.

SNYTE
So did I.

EXT. STORE - NIGHT

The police have blocked off the store and parking lot. A medical examiner struggles to make sense of what's left of the robber.

A detective, ROARK takes it all in. His partner, HELLER, approaches.

ROARK
What does it take to do something
like that?

HELLER
Sledgehammer?

ROARK
Or a wrecking ball. What a mess.

HELLER
Dispatch just came out with this:
two assailants, looks like
attempted rape, stopped by some
vigilante.

The first detective looks at his partner.

HELLER (CONT'D)
Forensics is scraping them off the
pavement.

ROARK
Jesus. What's happening?

9 INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

9

Rose is sitting on Snyte's couch. He hands her a cup of coffee.

SNYTE
Here, drink this.

She sips it as Snyte takes a seat.

SNYTE (CONT'D)

I can't drink coffee myself anymore. I'm unable to handle the caffeine.

ROSE

Dr. Snyte-

SNYTE

Everette. Please.

ROSE

You called me here.

SNYTE

Rose, I don't know where Stephen is. And I am concerned that he may be in trouble. Now, I need to know. Has he been going any where lately, or talking to anyone on the phone?

ROSE

I don't understand. Hasn't he been here?

SNYTE

Yes. Every day and most nights. I know that you two have been having some difficulties, since the...

ROSE

Attack. Yes, he's been obsessed. With his work.

Snyte starts coughing. He struggles for a moment and takes a sip of water. He recovers.

SNYTE

Rose, he was always obsessed. It's what made him a good scientist. But when he stopped walking, I'd say it was more like he was possessed. Searching for something, beyond simple limb enhancement or robotics.

ROSE

What was he looking for?

SNYTE

I was hoping you might have that answer.

Rose looks away and spots a small brown BOOK on Snyte's desk.

ROSE
That's Stephen's journal.

He turns around.

SNYTE
Yes.

He gets up and brings it over to Rose.

SNYTE (CONT'D)
I had been looking through it for
some kind of answer. I just wanted
to help. Take a look.

Rose looks through it. The pages are filled with formulas
and hastily drawn sketches.

ROSE
I don't know what I'm looking at.

SNYTE
Neither do I. Rose, it's nonsense.
Ideas that go nowhere. Convolutated
notions. It's useless. Rose, I
need to know what Stephen has been
up to. To help him.

ROSE
I'm sorry Dr. Snyte. I don't think
I'm the person you should be
asking.

She rises.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I haven't been for a long time.

Snyte moves slowly to his feet.

SNYTE
Won't you stay a little longer? In
case he comes back.

ROSE
No, thank you. I'm very tired and
I want to be home. In case he
calls. Tomorrow I'm going to the
police.

8 But as she tries to move past Snyte, she staggers. Snyte 8
catches her and sits her back down on the couch.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I guess I'm more tired than I
thought.

SNYTE
That's all right, Rose. Rest here
a while.

Rose tries to fight her sudden fatigue, but is quickly
failing.

SNYTE (CONT'D)
You know Rose, I have dedicated my
life to science, to truth. And I
rose quickly in my profession
because I have always been able to
find the answers I sought. But
recently one answer has eluded me.

Rose drifts off into sleep.

SNYTE (CONT'D)
I need to know the truth. And I
believe that Stephen has found it.

Her head hits the couch. Snyte reaches inside Rose's purse
and pulls out her keys.

10 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT 10

CARLA sits in front of the two detectives. She has a black
eye and a split lip.

ROARK
So what did he look like?

CARLA
Which one?

ROARK
The one that's still alive.

CARLA
Big.

ROARK
Big?

CARLA
Big. Like a giant.

HELLER
 Anything else about this guy?

CARLA
 I couldn't see much.

ROARK
 His face, his clothes, anything?

CARLA
 I wasn't really looking. You know?

11 INT. OFFICE - NIGHT 11

Rose wakes up on the couch. Snyte isn't there. She walks out into the hall.

12 INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS 12

The building is deserted. Rose walks cautiously down the hall and into...

13 INT. LAB - CONTINUOUS 13

...Stephen's lab. The place is a mess. Papers are strewn everywhere. There are all kinds of half-constructed devices. Most resemble human limbs.

Clearing away some of papers from a table, she finds a small figure. It is the size of a cat with four crudely constructed "limbs" sticking up into the air.

Moving to Stephen's desk, Rose goes through his drawers. They have been cleaned out, their contents thrown on the desk and floor.

But when Rose goes to close one of the desk drawers, it won't shut. Something is blocking it. Looking behind the drawer, Rose finds a JOURNAL, identical to the one that Snyte had earlier.

Rose reads. The writing is clear and well-ordered, the complete opposite of the journal Snyte had been looking through. This is Stephen's actual journal.

Rose doesn't understand. She gets up and heads for the door. As she passes the table, she sees something on the floor.

Bending down for a closer look, she finds a PIECE OF PAPER crumpled into a ball. There is writing on it. She smooths it out. On the one side it simply says, "Rose". She turns it over:

"I'm not here anymore. You'll understand soon. It's all in my journal. I'm sorry.

Stephen"

Rose drops the note and gets to her feet, bumping into the table. The small figure snaps to life, struggling to move its awkward body. Startled and confused, Rose moves through the door and straight into...

14 INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

14

...Snyte.

SNYTE

Rose. I was afraid you had left.

ROSE

I was just looking around.

SNYTE

Is everything all right?

He sees the journal in Rose's hand.

SNYTE (CONT'D)

Why don't we go back to my office?
To figure this all out.

He extends his hand to lead the way. It's covered in dry ink and hastily cleaned.

ROSE

No, I really ought to be going.

She pushes past him and moves down the hall.

SNYTE

Rose?

She keeps walking.

15 EXT. STREET - NIGHT

15

Rose walks quickly away from the building. Someone pulls her into an alley.

16

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

16

Snyte hits Rose in the head. She falls to the ground, her face bleeding. Snyte lunges at her.

SNYTE

How did he do it? I need to know,
Rose.

Behind him, the figure of a large man drops silently out of the sky.

Snyte tries to strangle Rose. But he stops. He starts to cough, clutching at his chest. Rose pushes Snyte away. He struggles to his knees. Taking out his pills. His hands are shaking, he drops the pills. He can't catch his breath.

SNYTE (CONT'D)

I need to know the truth. How did
he do it?

He makes one last feeble grab for Rose.

WHAM! Snyte hits the ground in a crumpled heap, his spine broken, twisted into a horrific shape. His mouth agape, his eyes wide with surprise.

The Figure looms over Rose as she tries to comprehend the last few moments of her life. She is lost in a fog of pain and confusion. She is shaking and the thing before her heaves its massive frame up and down with a slow steady breath, but they are both silent. It moves forward into the light in a single massive motion. It's not a living creature but anger and vengeance forged into mechanical parts and animated with some unknown power. The worst thoughts of a tortured man made real in gigantic and distorted dimensions.

Rose pushes herself to her feet and stares into the two white glowing lights that approximate eyes. Her face is bloody. She doesn't blink, she doesn't run, and she doesn't take her eyes off the thing in front of her.

The giant's hand comes up close to Rose's face. She looks down to Snyte, then back up at the figure. She backs away. Step by step she distances herself.

The Figure waits, but doesn't try to stop her. She's not coming back. The figure crouches down, then launches into the air, disappearing. A loud thud can be heard from him landing onto one of the buildings. Rose is alone.

17 EXT. ALLEY - MORNING

17

The alley is now a crime scene. Rose is there with the two detectives. She hands Roark Stephen's journal.

ROSE

It's all in there. I think.
You'll have to read it.

ROARK

Didn't you?

Rose shakes her head.

ROARK (CONT'D)

Didn't you want to know the truth?

ROSE

The truth is my husband is dead.
The rest of it doesn't matter.

Rose walks away. In the distance behind her a tiny figure moves from rooftop to rooftop.

FADE TO BLACK.