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A PROSPECTIVE VIBE
FOR THE SHORT SUSPENSE THRILLER

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his girl

DEAD MAN PRESENTS
A DANIEL HOLLIDAY PICTURE

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his girl

11 minutes (est.)
Erotic suspense thriller
USA
English
2.39
Color
2.1 Stereo

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scenario

FIRST Allegra is moving to New York to be with her boyfriend Marcus. But she's forgotten something. Her dad Leonard let's himself in to drop off Allegra's curling iron. He says what he thinks might be one of his last goodbyes to his daughter.

THEN Leonard makes to leave. Finding himself in the car, he can't pull out: he's starting to obsess over losing his daughter. Allegra jumps in the shower and jumps on a FaceTime call with Marcus. They do the best kind of fucking an internet-supported long-distance relationship can allow for. Leonard can't bring himself to leave, heads back inside to await Allegra finishing her shower.

BUT Leonard breaks down in Allegra's arms when she appears from the bathroom in just a towel. He laments the loss of his daughter, but it's clear he has other intentions. Leonard makes a violent sexual pass at Allegra, one to which she puts up futile resistance, getting brutalized for her disobedience. She plays along enough to survive, just enough to disable her attacker through the application of the heated curling iron inside his exposed asshole.





Characters

Allegra

Allegra is on the cusp of taking her final step out of adolescence. She's smart, did well in school, and moving to New York is a move toward authoring her own life. Sure she's moving to be with a boy, but he's as much a bed warmer as he is an anchor in the world's greatest city. She's moving for herself, plain and simple.

Allegra's relationship with her father was always filled with love, security, and protection. At points in her late teenage years, she might have described it as stifling, but she knows now she was just seeking a bit of rebellion. Because if she honestly considers the possible dads she could have had, she wouldn't have had hers any other way.

Leonard

Leonard's as regular as they come. A man nearing the end of a professional life that wouldn't register as remarkable. He made enough money to take enough vacations and show enough love to enough of his family. He'd admit to his wife and the mother of his children over a red wine, "I've lived a good life". It's when he feels his daughter slipping outside of the family he spent his life securing that Leonard feels that enough sometimes isn't enough.

Marcus

Marcus hasn't yet had enough responsibility to mint him as a man proper. He's overdue for a quarter-life crisis. He's got a baseline skillset to survive in New York -- which isn't nothing -- but he's still waiting around for a someday he's sure is coming: a someday when he doesn't play as many video games, doesn't have to worry about money, and doesn't exist within the walls of an 100 square feet apartment. It'll happen, he says.





Exterior

Allegra's up and moving from the suburbs of Los Angeles. This is a street people grow up on, where kids trick-or-treat on Halloween, where home owners greet mail carriers in the morning.

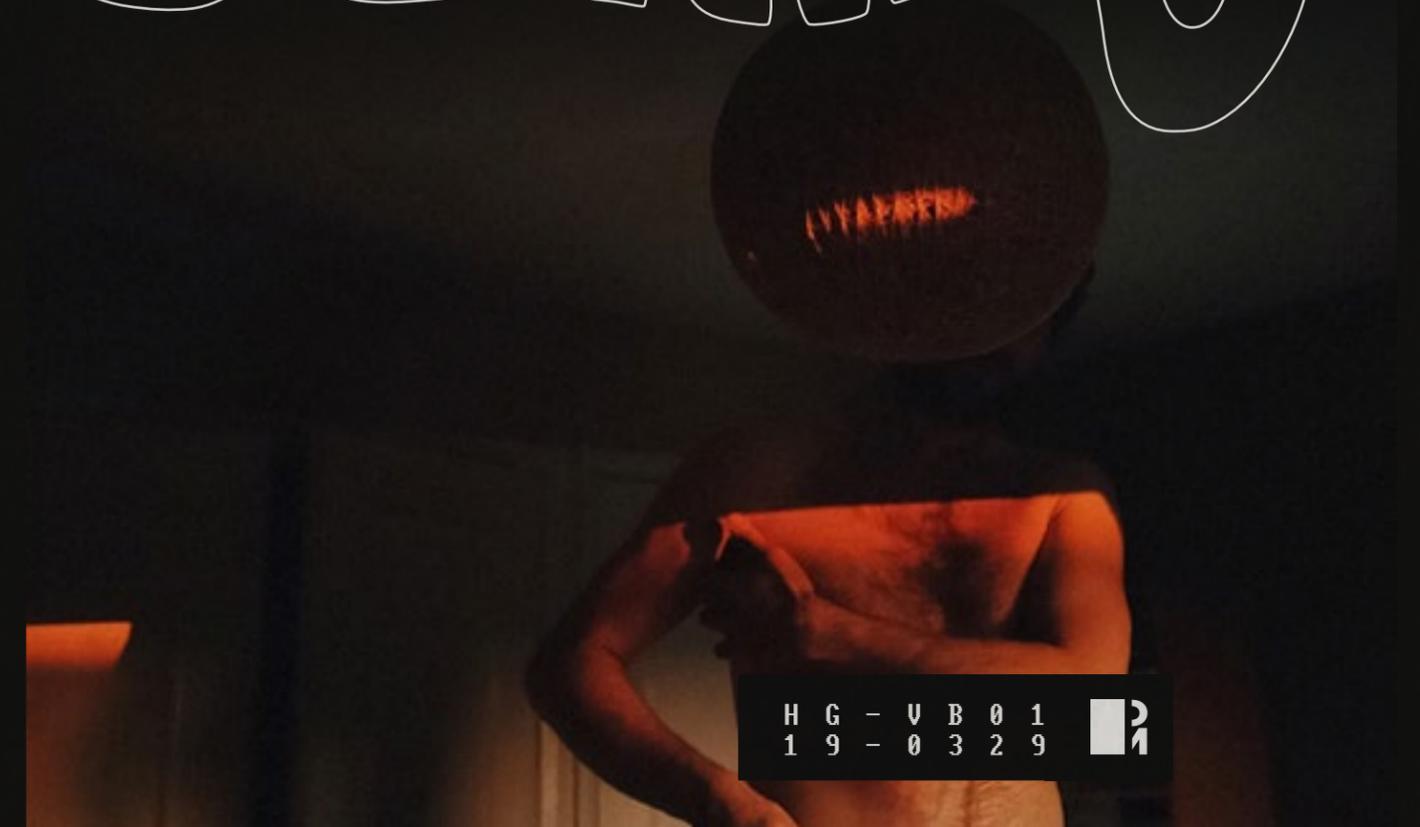
By night, when our story takes place, the street falls quiet.

Interior

There are two interiors used in HIS GIRL: Allegra's apartment and Marcus' apartment. Allegra's space is one in flux: packed and ready for her (perhaps indefinite) cross-country move, populated with iconography of an adolescence she's leaving behind.

Marcus has about as much space as any twenty-something living in New York could expect for themselves: not much. And like many of his peers, he embraces a financially necessitated asceticism branded as "minimalism". If it's not sold at IKEA, The Home Depot, or Best Buy, Marcus doesn't own it.

Setting





Director's statement

I was on the hunt for something extreme when my girlfriend had a dream. The content was different to that which I ultimately put to paper here, but the energies, the dynamics, the movement was what I became fascinated by. The scenario of HIS GIRL pared down this dream to a saturated sprint of titillation, suspense, and brutality.

Multiple times over the course of attending festivals with my last picture did I encounter other shorts that contained extremeness and intensity at their core, seemed animated by a courage to deliver sense impressions that many an audience thought went too far. The risks in these pictures were evident, and yet these creators opened the throttle on their engines and shot forth like Evel Knievel.

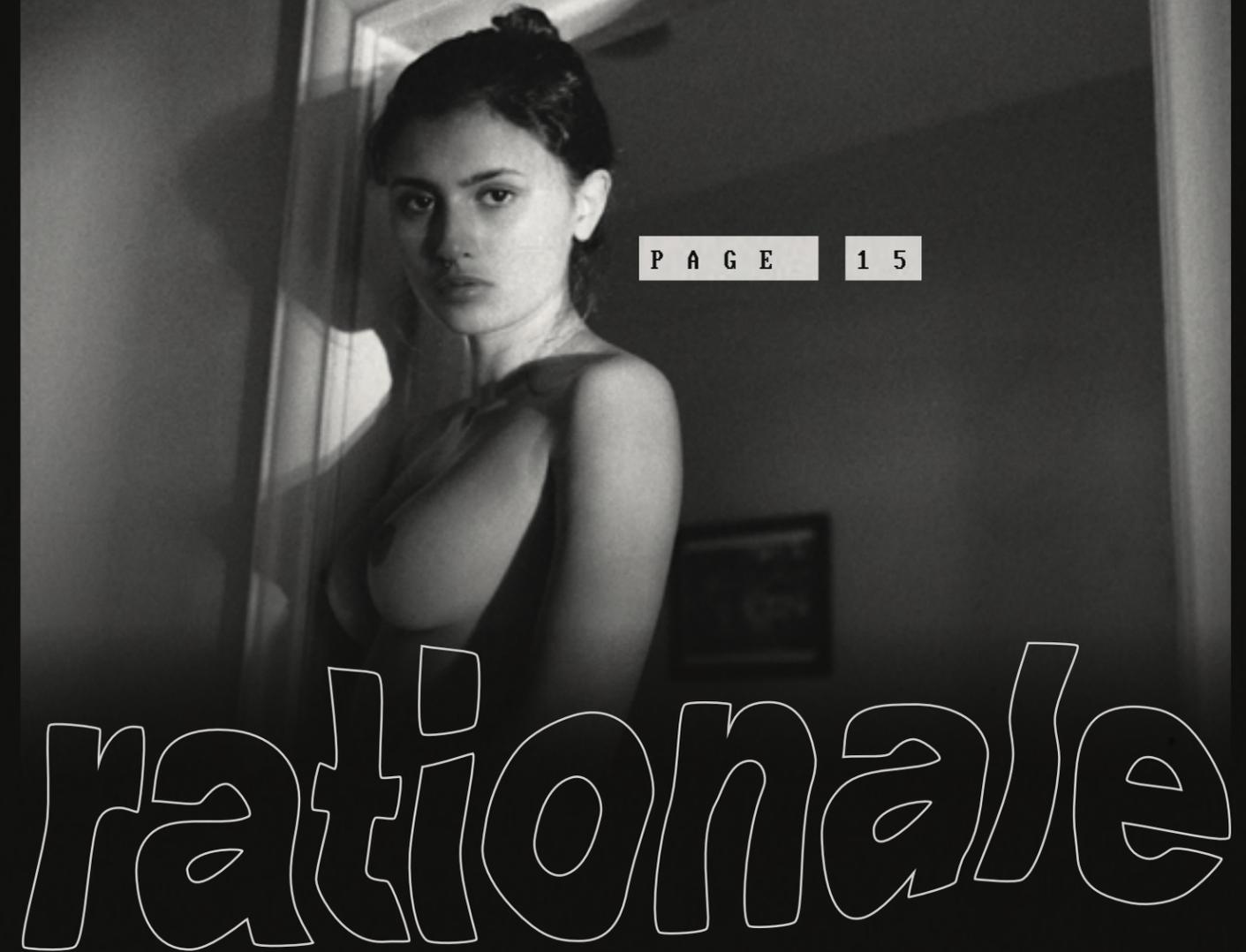
HIS GIRL demands the deliberation and conviction of a dare devil. Not a single choice here can be made lightly. This picture is a tight-rope walk across the Grand Canyon: tragedy lies in all directions but one.

I'm guided in finding this direction solely by feel. For feelings are where this picture starts and ends. The audience's experience of HIS GIRL is one of visceral intensity. The total discipline of cinema is the only vector robust enough to carry such an experience.

There's a punkish desire here to provoke, but not out of some delayed adolescent rebellion (I think). I deeply value being provoked as an audience member. There is little more precious possibility that cinema holds to me than the provocation of feelings that sit on the "negative" side of the spectrum. For these feelings which reality incurs devastating costs when serving up, the cinema can give merely for the price of admission. If one encountered in the real world the feelings this picture is designed, one would surely be in the direst of straits. Here those same feelings will only cost one 11 minutes of their life. If nothing else, that's too good a bargain to pass up.

I don't think I'll be certain why I'm so fascinated by this scenario, delivered in this way, until the movie is made. For now, I've included some of my thinking on the core pillars of the picture in an attempt to convey that a lack of certainty isn't necessarily tantamount to a lack of consideration.

- Daniel Holliday



rationale

Sex

Sex has an incomparable power, for bad as much as good. Like fire or nuclear fusion. Sex makes everything higher stakes, dials up the risks as it dials up the rewards. Sex is a quotidian engine of extreme experience.

Sex is the first domain we enter without our parents by our side. Sure, we get "the talk", we might get provided contraception if we're lucky, but, fundamentally, our parents' guidance should have no bearing on the finding and defining of our sexual selves. Sex is the first domain of true independence. Sex is the first wedge that drives us from the family unit.

Men raising women

Any heterosexual guy who's pursued women beyond friendship has been threatened with violence -- from blade,

firearm, or something more "fun" -- from these women's fathers. The threat is made usually on the first meeting, usually through a smile and a stiff handshake. These fathers probably couldn't articulate it, but inside that threat is terror. Terror that the family unit they have built for two decades will be ruptured. Terror that their daughter will fall out of the bounds within which they can be kept safe. Terror that their daughters no longer need to be kept safe. Terror that ultimately the little girls they raised bearing their own surname will have that very name erased; replaced by that of the guy on the other end of the handshake when joined with that now-woman in holy matrimony.

This a complex concoction of conflicting concerns. It carries within it the perverted tradition of marriage where women were property, where a father would literally be agreeing to the transfer of that which he owns when his daughter's hand is taken. It's the terror of this potential loss those oft-heard threats contain.

Desire, sexuality, and intercourse are where the perceived loss starts. A domain where no father can lead his daughter. A body which was once an infant, from between whose legs he once wiped shit, grows out of his custody.



approach

Tone

HIS GIRL is fundamentally a suspense thriller. Consistent with the canon of the genre -- which includes DRESSED TO KILL, TENEBRE, HALLOWEEN, all descendents of PSYCHO -- the picture is in the territory of "elevated trash". There's a schlock element at play here in the unabashed broad strokes of the scenario and the loadness of its treatment.

However, HIS GIRL swaps the thrusting of a knife for the thrusting of a penis. This adds a severity to the "human monster" setup, one that has been eroded from the slasher by its now-cliché status. This severity is of a piece with extreme cinema of the Twenty-First Century, notably of Korea. Pictures such as OLDBOY, I SAW THE DEVIL, as well as the Mo Brothers' KILLERS do brutal and complex work on an audience through their extremeness. HIS GIRL is designed to do some similar work.

It would be a critical misstep to handle this material with the superficial sincerity of drama. Instead, HIS GIRL is amplified and hyperbolized, saturated to intense simplicity, to keep audiences out of their heads and firmly in their bodies. For the facts of any story are entirely made up, they contain no truth. HIS GIRL is designed to provoke feelings in each audience member, the truth of which is unquestionable.

HIS GIRL bubbles with anxious tension, with a building dread. Central to the escalation of the scenario is a constant

one-upping of the limit, of just how far the picture will go. This is as thrilling as it is nerve-racking, the audience will never feel comfortable. The limited space, the tight framing, the relentless sound seal the audience inside this system: a pot filled with water, the lid on, and the heat cranked to high.

There are tangs of the sensational, the pornographic, the absurdly comic. It should make an audience horny, and to feel shame for getting horny in the movie theatre. It should make an audience disgusted, but know that they too are often disgusting. It should be physiologically confusing. Many should not know how to feel about it at the end. But they'll be unable to deny they felt something.

Something strong.

Texture

Every bodily fluid is given screen time in HIS GIRL. Coupled with the rain outside and the steam from Allegra's shower, the picture consequently has a dewy, glossy, texture. Liquid hangs as steam, rolls over body and windshield in heavy beads.

Allegra's apartment is in precisely the shape you would expect right before a cross-country move: a mess. This establishes the picture with an oppressive textural richness, crowding in on us. Leonard too, bundled up in his car trying to leave, is cramped. He sheds the trenchcoat choking him, fidgets in the seat.





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Figure 01 : Murder in an elevator.
DRESSED TO KILL
Dir. Brian De Palma, 1980

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Edit

The dominant formal characteristic of HIS GIRL is suspense generated through intercutting. Different perspectives are to be woven together to provide enough information to propel the scenario and hide enough information to compel the audience to be caught in an anxiety of "What's next?!", as well as imbuing the picture with a rapid tempo. This is the primary formal goal of HIS GIRL: the translation of the feeling of anxious suspense to the audience.

This montage-first approach calls to mind sequences from the late-1970s, early-1980s genre pictures of Dario Argento and Brian De Palma (see Fig. 01), both of which take up the mantle of the iconic shower sequence of PSYCHO. In addition, DUNKIRK is also prescriptive for how suspense can be carried between perspectives, between sequences, in a way that is propulsive: building a tension in one perspective that is then thrown into the next and layered with additional suspense, and so on until the audience is a quivering anxious mess.

Once the edit is given primacy in the approach, a number of consequences relevant for other departments fall out.

Camera

The use of camera in HIS GIRL is primarily in support of the approach to montage. Given the tempo strived toward in the edit, frames will be specific and singular: we won't be sticking around long enough to explore the image here. The effect of designing the picture for the edit is that there are very few places where expression falls to a single shot, rather it is the phrasing of multiple shots in often-rapid succession that will serve as the picture's primary expressive engine.

Practically, this entails a reliance on close shots and inserts, a reliance on reducing the ambiguity of any single image to as close to zero as possible, such that the concatenation of shots can be kept tight. As an analogy, shots will be to phrases what words are to sentences: expression is almost entirely extracted through the building of complex moments from the assembly of simple images.

There are exceptions to this, moments where the camera

will reign as the dominant expressive mode. Specifically the camera will feel fluid and alive in the beginning, expressing Allegra's freedom: packing up, she's about to move across country. When Leonard returns, however, the camera takes on a gravity and severity, a brutality from which Allegra can't escape -- not unlike the conclusion of 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY -- until she fights back and the camera once again regains its movement towards the picture's conclusion.

The use of oners -- both moving and static -- will derive their strength from playing off of the typical high tempo of the picture as well as set the terms of camera freedom. The first oner, the roaming unknown POV, is reminiscent of the opening shot of HALLOWEEN: the camera as embodied character. The second static oner comes during the attack on Allegra by Leonard: the bottom of the frame will cut their waists and box them in place; Allegra pinned as figuratively as she is literally, the horror of what's happening below the frame we can only guess at. The interplay of these moments of zero-tempo against the rapid clip of montage will seek to make the fast feel faster and the slow feel interminably slow. Anxiety and dread, dialled to maximum intensity.

Light and Color

Light and color are deployed in HIS GIRL to support the legibility of the intercut. Given the high tempo of the edit and simple graphic approach to camera, light and color are methods of encoding the disparate perspectives such that there is never any question where we are through the intercut. This mostly counts in the second sequence, but is relevant for the establishing of the different spaces in the first sequence. Each perspective will be color-coded: Allegra's in teal/blue, Leonard's in an orange/red, Marcus in a yellow. Such a commitment to color will open up greater possibilities for high tempo: inserts can be cut together without the need for wider shots in order to convey where they are happening.

Secondarily, colored lights will amplify and heighten the expression, establishing the picture as exaggerated along genre lines. This is non-trivial, not merely a consideration to give HIS GIRL a "cool" look. The severity of the subject matter demands a hyperreal treatment: this picture isn't a prestige drama, and as such needs to be unabashed in its genre look. The image needs to be as saturated by color as the picture is by feeling.

Sound

Sound will be used to both hold the montage together, as well as build an oppressive, anxious texture. The constant running of the shower intercut with the beep of the seatbelt warning is a constant force of putting the audience inside the crucible of mental turmoil Leonard undergoes when he can't bring himself to leave. Additionally, it provides a instant hook for the audience to know where in space we are across a rapid tempo. Additionally, Marcus' incessant nagging, carried from Allegra's phone, dials up the tension of the picture's climax: not only can't Marcus do anything about the horror Allegra is subjected to, he is given presence in the scene by the grating sibilance of a smartphone speaker.

Score

True to the picture's genre roots, the score will be theme-led, aiming for the iconicism of JAWS, HALLOWEEN, PSYCHO, and CAPE FEAR. In addition, Hans Zimmer's body of work, specifically in DUNKIRK, is exceptionally informative about the building of endless rising tension.

Initial experiments in scoring for HIS GIRL have made use of the interplay of falling melody and rising countermelody and *vice versa* to express the building of suspense as we go deeper and darker as the picture proceeds. In addition, the harmonic layers build chord progressions through the movement of a single note of the triad to suspend the chord or shift the root note. This creates a feeling of the uncanny -- the same, but different -- as well as generating tension and a sense of constriction.











director

Daniel Holliday

As a director, Daniel draws deeply on his past lives playing in bands and as a graphic designer. Working holistically across the script, the edit, the score, as well as producing, Daniel exploits all possible avenues of expression, building a product from all sides.

Since 2015, Daniel has directed two shorts under the imprint of Dead Man.

Skincreepers (2018)

When alien doppelgängers show up, an occult journalist and a conspiracy theorist must fight for their lives.

Daniel's most recent effort as director is the gothic thriller short film SKINCREEPERS. Steeped in a craft-centric approach to genre that was cemented in the early-1980s in the pictures of John Carpenter and Dario Argento, SKINCREEPERS gave Daniel the space to focus on delivering sequences of tight tension as a director, and getting hands-on as the picture's co-writer, editor, and composer. Above all, the picture mined the potential of the doppelgänger to express the violence of self-improvement.



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SKINCREEPERS
Dir. Daniel Holliday, 2018



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