

A narrow brick alleyway with people walking. On the left, a brick building has a sign that says "HEAT" and "HONGKONG SPACE 香港空间". In the background, a red gate is visible. The alleyway is paved with bricks and has a wooden easel on the right side.

Riding The Bull

48 HOURS IN A FILMMAKER'S HELL

by Brandon Violette

"You'll hear a lot of us call this the festival for cowboys because all weekend it'll feel like you're riding a bucking bronco. Welcome to your first rodeo," a three-year contest veteran told me in the registration line. What makes the 48 Hour Film Contest so unique is that it generates its own films and its own contest. That and a lot of anxiety in its participants.

The contest in a nutshell: Pick a random genre from a box containing a selection of genre types from "time travel" and "western" to "horror" and "musical". Use the next 48 hours to cast, shoot and edit the piece into a coher-

ent and compelling four- to seven-minute film. All that's required is a hyped-up crew willing to follow you into the fire. A crew that knows it has no idea what to expect, bound only by a collective abhorrence to the "musical" and "western" categories.

When it was our team's turn to reach into the box that sealed the fate of our weekend, it was as if the movie gods were smiling on us; we got our number one choice.

Then we were off to make our dark comedy. We hastily convened at a cafe and hashed out a plan sipping overpriced espressos before switching to cheap beer.

The Plan

Friday evening – write the script. Shoot the opening scene of our tragically costumed hero that very night. Spend all of Saturday morning and afternoon getting the remaining scenes of our hero trying to find the head of his costume after losing it during a baijiu-tinged haze. Send the actors home by Saturday evening and, for the next six or seven hours, edit a rough cut to be delivered to a music composer

standing by in Los Angeles. He'd score it and send it back to us in time for us to wake up Sunday morning after a good night's sleep with a pitch-perfect film just needing a few tweaks – all of which, we could surely take care of before 7pm, when we'd mosey over to the contest drop-off point at Meridian Space and deliver a killer film.

Did it happen as planned? No. But one thing was certain: we did get dark comedy.



01 The smile that summed up our moods during the first shot of Saturday morning in Baochao Hutong – before our child actor wrapped and everybody reverted back to cursing and violently insisting, “That was your job!” over and over again.

02 Pretty sure Baochao Hutong has never seen a group shot like this before.



03 One rule of the contest dictates the script is written on the spot, thrown out and/or re-written in between takes. But mostly thrown out.

04 The costume head that goes missing is later found by a young boy. Little does he know, that sweet expression on the lamb's face is masking a dark secret involving his father's disappearance.



05 With no script supervisor, regular stops are needed to decide who's at fault for screwing up a scene's continuity. And so the finest method to apportion blame is born: working backwards and holding a majority vote to assign blame.

06 Tourists on rickshaws love looking into the camera during a scene, one of the lesser known hazards of shooting in a narrow hutong.



09 Forced to move after a security guard blocked us from shooting a building in Xizhimen. His reason? It couldn't be in the background. Our response? "No problem, sir," as we moved to the opposite side of the building and continued our shoot.

10 It takes a supreme amount of confidence to strut a busy sidewalk in a flamboyant costume swigging *baijiu*. That Saturday afternoon our actor possessed said confidence and then some. It was at this time, around hour twenty-six when we realized this experience was making mad men of us all.

So, what went wrong?

We were accosted by a drunken, aggressive local man who went out of his way to ruin our opening shots just a few hours after the start of the competition. He repeatedly drove his petrol engine scooter past our camera revving and beaming his headlights at the lens.

We permanently scarred a mother and her young daughter with an episode of debauched behavior – all for the film, of course – when we were required to loiter near a school swigging *baijiu*. The lady called for security. We called for a taxi and failed to get an important shot.

We were forced to film in one of the city's biggest



07 The priceless look on our child actor's face when he learns he gets to keep the costume before it's taken back from him for a very dark reason.



08 How to get a tracking shot on a budget: 1) Find a parked scooter. 2) Locate the owner. 3) Explain the situation a few times. 4) Convince confused owner to lend scooter to strange foreigners while puffing out chest to seem extra tall. 5) Permission granted.



11 How to make fake blood on a shoestring. 1) Look for a supermarket. 2) Crack open a bottle of ketchup. 3) Leave streaks with your hand and let it dry in the sun. (It actually works really well.)



12 Moments after the contest submission deadline when the weekend's stresses are absolved with cold beer.

inebriate neighborhoods after dark where we met one fellow hell-bent on ruining our shoot by repeatedly wandering through the shot declaring: "I am not an animal!" We then wasted an hour explaining to his frantic girlfriend (who demanded we delete any scene with him in it) that we had no intention of using our footage as

evidence of her beau being a nuisance.

In truth, much went wrong. But in the end, our film, *Funeral Friends*, had, at least, been born.

To see the final version of *Funeral Friends*, go to tinyurl.com/funeralfriends.