

**Royal Holloway Travel Award
(Santander Travel Award)**
A Report: *'Stalemate'*, a film by Tom Holmes



Myself during the first location shoot of the trip, at King's Park, Perth, WA

The Film

'*Stalemate*' is a short film that invites the viewer to experience a snapshot of the early life of an extremely talented actor, but also an extremely gifted and creative man whose success was only just beginning before he tragically left the Earth. A brief treatment for the 12-minute Heath Ledger biopic is provided below:

"A young aspiring actor experiences troubles at home during his parents' divorce. He uses this conflict to direct his wholehearted attention to his career. We return to the character a few years later as he is enjoying his life with his sister on a sunny morning in Perth, Australia. They talk about his creativity and talent before he leaves to talk with his best friend about a big opportunity coming his way.

The young actor attends the audition but applies for the lead role rather than the cameo that they were advertising. He gets it. But, before he leaves, his family urge him to consider a job closer to home. He perseveres with his ambition and packs to leave for America the next day.

Still young, the actor excels on-set and is eager to inform his friends and family of his success, but struggles to do so far away from home.

He returns home, to find his sister and friend awaiting his return."

We know the rest.



The primary poster for Stalemate during the promotion of the film

The final cut is very similar to the treatment and intended script reading. Members of the crew have received top grades as part of their producing, cinematography and sound design courses. We are all very proud of the film and that all our efforts paid off, reflected in the incredible audience reaction worldwide. The screening of the film on 3rd May 2019 is a personal highlight of the entire process, and it is representative of the contribution and support put in by such a wide range of people. In the audience that day were financial contributors, family of the production team, friends of the team on the same course at RHUL, and those who had simply followed our journey on one of our social media profiles. Furthermore, the event was livestreamed so that our friends over in Australia could watch along with everyone else!

The importance of the film's content is felt in the feedback that I have received as the director. Heath's story is such a sad and shocking one, but the talent that he possessed is what makes *Stalemate* such a celebratory event. I know actors who are personally inspired by Heath, and to portray elements of his early life in a location that means a lot to me and

my family was an immense pleasure. This is why the Travel Fund was such a boost to the production of this film. To shoot any of *Stalemate* out of Australia would have been difficult. The authenticity we were able to achieve by shooting in locations that are relevant to the story was critical. In many scenarios, it felt like the locations we were immersed in were actually another character in the film.

The film was the last production I made at Royal Holloway; a short film that has almost 600 views on YouTube to date. As well as this, on Facebook and Instagram the film has amassed more than 300 followers who have watched the crew's progress since the early concept development, through promotion for the film, location recces, travel and shooting! Run primarily by our cinematographer, Bianca Shirk, and soundie, Emma Cole, the pages engaged and entertained our audience. With the excitement and promise of shooting on location in Western Australia, the buzz for the production of *Stalemate* quickly grew. Crowdfunding steadily amassed a healthy total during this period and by the time we were flying out, the support was phenomenal. We went into shooting full of confidence and enjoyed every minute of it. The reason the shoots were so enjoyable and ran so smoothly was thanks to our brilliant producer, Ben Jacquin. I have explained this fact to countless fans/viewers of the film; it would not have been possible without Ben's flawless organisation. With the crowdfunding bolstering our budget for production, he efficiently purchased an ATA Carnet (a document that categorically listed all equipment and allowed simple transit from the UK, through Qatar and into Australia), before sourcing props, completing location bookings and creating a shooting schedule. Thanks to the Travel Fund, we have been able to thank our contributors, pay logistics expenses, and reimburse travel fees for young Australian talent. The Travel Fund did not directly facilitate the transportation of a good friend and gifted actor from RHUL, but it did allow us to bring an additional member with us to Perth. Gez Downing played the role of Heath in *Stalemate* – a difficult protagonist to execute with such accuracy. Gez has given us a memorable and enjoyable performance.



A selection of frames from the film

Expenses Description

Breakdown of Final Budget (£)

<i>Indiegogo</i> crowdfunding total:	£1716
Personal contribution (before / after RHUL funding):	Approx. £3500 / £1500
Royal Holloway (Santander) Travel Fund:	£2000
TOTAL:	Approx. £5800

Breakdown of Final Costs (£)

Flights:	£3935
ATA Carnet (transport of kit from RHUL):	£600
Accommodation for 10 nights:	Approx. £600
Travel within the city (from/to airport inc.):	>£250
Location bookings:	>£300
Props:	>£50
Actors' wages:	N/A
TOTAL:	>£5750

Summary

This project enabled myself and a group of fellow filmmakers to produce a short film that draws from real events yet still creates a self-contained narrative arc. The story is emotionally driven, with traits and decisions made by our protagonist that reflect our own actions. I hope that the film has inspired, and provided an insight into Heath's life, as well as raised awareness of the factors that led to his tragic death. The production has become a celebration of both his life and the beauty of the place that he grew up in. A period of about 6 months in my life that I will never forget, embodied in a 12-minute story for all to see!

If you would like to watch *Stalemate*, please click or copy the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwkpIXscDe0>