

GLENFIDDICH  
"PERFECT DIVE"

a VR experience by DAFFY LONDON



## **Glenfiddich - Preliminary Interpretation**

The aim is to make a VR film in which we witness a Perfect Dive, realtime over a 1 minute 30 seconds time period. (half of the length of a competitive free dive)

I'm very excited to be invited to the conversation for a VR Glenfiddich project featuring the immersive, personal journey of a free dive.

I have a visceral dramatic idea, which I feel combines the strengths of VR with the beauty of the script.

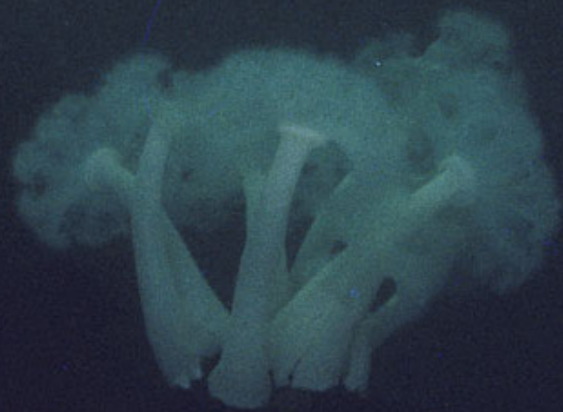
To compliment the TVC campaign, it's worth looking at a VR experience that holds some core cohesion of elements (such as sea creatures) that bind the two, but are not necessarily derivative adaptations. Individual pieces that adhere and celebrate their own format, retaining their own unique flavour, but be driven from the same core DNA. The VR piece therefore would not be a conversion of the TVC but a complimentary piece and potentially more abstract. Each sells each other, and in turn both sell the product.

VR is the latest buzzword. Everyone wants it. Albeit not everyone knows how to do it, nor what to do with it. Therefore before I can truly give you a clear vision of an experience that I feel is appropriate for your campaign, I feel it important that we meet up, as opposed to having a faceless, VR-less conference call. In this meeting I want to talk to you about my experiences with VR and show you relevant examples in a headset. I should say that I'm not a fan of '360 video'. This is not VR. Therefore I don't want to show you stuff this way. Along with the VR discussion, I'd like to talk to you about my own story with regards to my connection to the world underwater.

It's serendipitous that Pete Zuccarini the TVC Cinematographer and I are connected once again. It's been a privilege to be working by his side over the years, and the bonus is that we've already tested extensively for VR. So the notion that we could be applying our research findings towards a breathtaking, next level project is very exciting to me.

The first hurdle we must traverse on this journey is a tricky one. It's really important that we explore the best avenue for your VR film. Choosing who sees it and on what device fundamentally dictates the final formulation of the experience. For me, a 360 youtube video versus a pure curated VR headset experience are as different as a cat gif and an IMAX film. My visions tend towards the IMAX.





VR comes with challenges. Each challenge feeds into the other.

The trick is to find the solutions to draw people to see it, implement the proper visual track to avoid audience nausea, it's a tricky paradigm for storytelling to ensure proper guidance, we need to direct our audience to look the right way during our experience.

My work on the Avengers tackled all of these issues, and in fact broke some pre-concieved rules I was told couldn't be broken. I therefore feel it would be worthwhile me giving to you a condensed version of the presentation I gave at a German conference on this very subject called 'Oh scheiße... ich bin IRONMAN!'. The principles established here all play a part in my future projects. There are methods here that will help us find strategies to make Glenfiddich VR both maverick AND nausea free.

The Avengers experience ad agency 72 and Sunny had to learn a new language at break neck speed on that job, and it helped that it was to always remain in the computer as a piece of photoreal CGI. It was relatively controllable. Obviously underwater filming is more challenging (live action, underwater, holding breath) so I think it would be beneficial for us to be talking this new language of VR in a meaningful way before we start submerging cameras under the sea.

As a guide to VR agenda points pertinent to this project,

- YouTube 360 vs VR headsets
- Previz is key
- Nausea and how to avoid
- Power of Persuasion
- Keeping it short
- Establishing the self
- Cross pollination of characters from TVC to VR

Take a look at this reactions trailer I cut for 'Oh scheiße, ich bin IRONMAN!' or 'Oh fuck, I'm IRON MAN!' These reactions are not accidental, but programmed into the root of the experience.

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

Now lets talk about your film.





## **Who are WE?**

Establishing the self in VR is key.

I'm working on an assumption that this piece is purely VR as opposed to that and a 360 video. In this case it's vital to establish who we are in the VR world. Are we the diver? Are we the people on the boat? Are we a film camera? or... are we a floating head, witnessing events with a soul like quality much like in Gaspar Noe's Enter the Void.

The instinct may lean towards having a full diver POV perspective throughout the piece. This idea deserves discussion, and would on the surface appear to be the way to go. I feel however that with the incredible beauty of a divers motion, and with such an open chasm that is the ocean, we may end up not having enough of a focal point that is integral to a great VR experience.

I've gone through and imagined the VR user from various perspectives and I found that stepping outside of the divers body and witnessing the action would far better make for a much deeper understanding of both the person, and the skill required to dive in this unique way.

Also, by separating the POV from the diver, the VR users allow themselves to look into their own mind and psyche, to allow for a far more profound experience.

## **Connection to Nature**

The free diver life seems to be beautiful, yet isolating and cathartic. Clips mostly show these guys swimming alone having a solitary experience. I wonder if creatures could be the connection necessary to bring this VR experience into the original, and to reinterpret the free divers journey.

We often see large game animals hugging humans, like there's a special connection quite out of the ordinary. I feel we could subtly hint at this in our film. Imagine our guy goes to this same spot daily to feed and connect with the local habitat. Creatures could echo his motion, just like he echoes theirs. I also like playing with people in VR. Allowing them to miss an entire side of an experience because you've been dangling a carrot in one direction. It could be amazing to witness a solitary free diver only to cleverly reveal he's been in the company of animals throughout, just hidden behind us. The biggest compliment in VR is repeat viewing.





## **A Unique Take**

There are already lots of interesting films made over the last few years which have covered the subject of free diving. Our aim is to make this campaign original and pull away from these matters already tackled. The TVC also has it's own unique take. One thing not yet done is real time. I would like to purify the concept for the VR experience, create a single motion, a single direction, a single deep personal quest for the diver, an unexpected journey for the VR user.

The current TVC concept allows us to get into the mind of the free diver through cuts and expressions. VR doesn't afford that luxury, so we must look for other cues.

For the sake of feasibility and allowance for the occasional digital body double, our swimmer should be slightly set apart from our own journey. Free divers in competition are almost robotic in rhythm, but as graceful as a fish. Our focus may be best served on staying pure to an underwater experience. Removing us from the day, the team, the challenge. This makes the film deeply personal. And it makes the only other person present... us the VR voyeur.

I would like to focus on the beginning of the film concentrating on the divers personal journey to the bottom of the sea, then the film becomes more about the VR user, a spectator, stranded, lost in this new space. I feel this when diving with Pete. He's given instruction, goes off and films, and I'm alone, surrounded by blue, and I'm suddenly mesmerised. On the surface it's a film about a free diver. Underneath it's a film about us.

## **Field Of View**

Framing VR is one of the genre's greatest challenges. I'd like to suggest that even though there may be water in all directions in a 360 film, that we target key action of the VR within a range of 120/180 degrees of head rotation. Take for example if someone sat on a chair or in bed, even standing, they would not need to contort themselves around to see something which is meant to be epic, yet placid. Turning around to a beautiful expanse of bluey gradient, peppered with bubbles, gives reassurance that there's no action to miss. People often look daft whizzing around with flailing arms whilst blinded to the real world by a headset. Free diving is all about respect and the understanding of ones own body. VR users shouldn't be falling off things trying to emulate this feeling of control.



## **Movement**

I have biased my projects choices over the years towards the aquatic. For many years I've been building a valuable library full of CGI underwater animals created for feature film, music video and commercial projects. These resources may well serve our creative process, schedule & budget.

The integration of footage, environments and the diver would be the thing that gives our project the edge. Further investigation of the idea will reveal what we should use and where. But the creatures I own were all chosen based on movement within the deep. Not the coloured variety that you normally find in the shallower waters, which I find less interesting. We're in the territory of Mantas, Morays, Jellyfish & Sharks etc

I'm a sucker for movement underwater. As an animator it's my very favourite thing to observe. from the swaying of seagrass or seaplants, to the rhythm that oscillates down a moray eel. My library of aquatic assets focuses on these graceful undulations. From animating Lionfish and Seahorses in Chemical Brothers 'Salmon Dance' to people swimming like dolphins in Johnnie Walker 'Fish', I've taken all my cues from Walt Disney's original 12 principles of animation, and all of studios associated films.

On observing the free diver TED talk referenced in Lisa Gunning's interpretation, we see Guillaume descending into the blue. With his shape abstracted, you'd be forgiven for mistaking him for an actual sea creature. It reminded me of Fantasia's Nutcracker Suite Pt 3. And I've since created a side by side video to share in our meeting, that is striking.

Travelling distance in VR needs handling carefully. Motion of cameras can't accelerate or decelerate. So we need to stick to a pretty rigid line of camera motion, staying true to the linear line of a free dive, and make the action take place around it. I'd like to use tricks to disorientate people away from the free diver. Utilising the similarity between the diver and other creatures to allow us to obscure our hero within the motion of other beasts.

If we can hide the diver in plain site, we stand more chance of surprising our audience. Like a dive where you can't wait to surface to tell all of the tales of what you saw, we should strive for the same in VR. Treat the VR headset like a divers mask.







## **Haptics**

Elements such as wind and moving chairs are often used to help VR experience feel more real. These additions are known as haptics. When I show people my own VR work, I find people get a more profound experience when I improve the general environment.

Getting people away from the busy office with colleagues pushing past their chairs, improving on the less ideal iPhone earbuds, even working on the temperature and aromas of the room. Free divers in competition plan for days, weeks, months and years for a solitary 3 minute moment. This moment for them proves to be profoundly life changing. Therefore we can and should encourage our audience to not only download and press play on our video, but do a little prep work to get full enjoyment of the experience. This can be done really simply with some upfront on screen suggestions. This to me is an example of taking VR to the next level by asking punters to be a little more involved.

## **Technique**

Pete and I developed a bespoke shooting method for VR which improves upon and simplifies the issues of conventional VR filming. Six small cameras filming at all angles certainly makes for a 360 image once stitched, but adds certain complications, such as, where does the cameraman hide? Small camera's suggests GO PRO level of detail, which is improving year on year, but it ain't no ALEXA or RED. And stitching unless given to VFX powerhouses is never perfect.

Our specialised process adopts a high resolution camera with incredible bit depth range, using a single fish-eye lens. We shoot coverage and composite the work together in post. It's still work, but it's time better spent. Depending on what we want our VR experience to be, will dictate how we use this setup.



## **Sound**

There are people in the VR field who are getting more excited about sound as they are image. In terms of spatial sound heard through headphones, the progression goes as per following.

MONO

STEREO

BINAURAL

VR BINAURAL

MONO is of course the same sound played through both ears.

STEREO can separate the sound per ear, and hint at sound moving through you.

BINAURAL plays with the waves of sound and how they enter your ear. Sounds can appear to be triggered in front of you, above you behind and below, as well as side to side. It is in effect a 3D system.

VR BINAURAL takes this sound and locks it to the coordinates of space. without the VR headset, headphones have no concept of rotation. So if something goes past your right ear and then you rotate 180 degrees, it will still be going past your right ear! VR binaural fixes this and allows for 3D sound which changes as you move your head. This allows for true experimentation of sound. Including dopler effects, and rotation based effects which change the sound scape as you look around. Each VR journey would have it's own unique sonics.\*

We used VR binaural in Avengers to great success, It's part of my presentation and I'm excited to show you, and push it further.

## **Colour**

I talk about a muted selection of creatures that I might want to feature.

I think another facet that could set this film apart is the avoidance of the 'GoPro' or 'National Geograpic' look. To create an atmospheric piece, with global colour tones that shift as we descend. That's not to say that colour wouldn't feature, rather it comes within surprise waves, via random brightly coloured fish and bioluminesce. The bioluminescence being a little fresher than the purples of 'Avatar'.

\*VR BINAURAL only works on the assumption that we build a downloadable app running Unity or something similar. For regular 360 VR video uploads sites, the sound would be downgraded to standard BINAURAL.





## Basic Premise

As mentioned, my idea can only truly form once the TVC is established, and when we know what our final output should be. However, I can describe how I see the experience within the confines of the information given to me so far. It takes into account the limitations which are unavoidable in VR. There are many ways to approach this piece and with all things considered I feel that our primal approach must be that our VR camera travels in real time, in one core direction, down.

A free diver floats above us piercing the water. He's face up with a clasped hand. Tranquil, Motionless, but thoughtful, and swaying with the current. He slowly opens his hand and we see an odd furry ball slip out. We watch it travel past our POV leaving a stream of plankton-esque particles trailing behind. We get a sense of vertigo as we see it travel and disappear into the infinite. Bubbles emerge from below, and we follow them back up to the surface. (In VR we need to show people what to see, the bubbles help re navigate) The free diver flips over, and slowly moves into action, and begins to descend down. We follow him. Starting underneath of his descent, small fish peck at the stream of bait. Passing hammerhead sharks come to inspect the small fish, he slowly catches up to us and deep down we can now see a kelp forest that we're about to enter.

The diver now far below us, we watch his movements echoed by seals which weave in and out of the kelp. We catch up to him at a small hole into a cave he dives down and the journey continues. We traverse the side of a rock, he's now motionless, sinking, echoed by jellyfish who also appear lifeless save small spasms in movement. Weirdly they spasm in time, and in sync with our divers heartbeats noises now distorted. The diver now behind us, on the journey we finish our single speed descent (anti nausea) and we find the bottom. Peering up, the free diver is on his final descent and gaining speed, lands in front of us on the sea bed dramatically, when the cloud of sand dissipates he looks up and above us a million fish have gathered swelling and gyrating with ripples of silver lightning. They circle around him like a vortex, and the patterns of undulation made are like nothing seen before.

In a flash our free diver takes off, ascends and swims through the mass of fish. As the fish clear, we see the silhouette of our diver against a dim light, and a large GLENFIDDICH logo fills our vision as we fade to black.







## Summary

My task was to make Avengers popular. Therefore it needed to transcend the other popular experiences, and actually touch the sides. Therefore I gave myself a singular goal. I wanted to find a way to encourage people to think, or even say out loud 'oh fuck! I'm Iron Man' as they realised they were not only in the suit, but they were staring at their own Iron Man reflection whilst taking in the tall surroundings of New York from Stark Tower. It's surprisingly effective and came from many iterations of testing. Amazingly I have footage of people online, doing just that.

For Glenfiddich, I have a similar strategy to play with the mind, it's ultimately what VR is there for. But instead of preparing people to fight an army of robots, I want people to go through the emotions... fight their anxieties, come to a place of quiet, and then hit them with a kind of awe. A response similar to the second breath a free diver takes on re-surfacing after 3 minutes underwater.

That awe would be programmed at the last moment of the film. People see the diver come down to the seabed at high velocity. Lost in a cloud of sand, when the dust settles he looks up, which of course makes us look up. The sky filled with creatures, writhing and contorting. With our head pointing up, and our vision filled with wonder, and the diver bursting through it, there is little doubt that those that invest emotionally, will gasp. At this point we fill the frame with the Glenfiddich logo.

The whole moment could be truly breathtaking.

The global intention is to create something that people watch by reputation. Those in VR circles saying, 'have you seen the latest Glenfiddich VR thing? you should, it will change you.'

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts. With such potential for this piece and such positive energy surrounding this new art form, I'm very eager to meet you all and discuss all of this further. Daffy

