Our film called Host is a thriller/murder mystery from the brief of creating a short film. Our selected target audience was 18–21-year-olds. The key message was that you should never trust your friend's mentally unwell girlfriend with themes of wealth and a focus on the social issue of nepotism.

Overview of the process: we started by drafting our ideas on a whiteboard. We wanted to do something with the genre of a thriller murder mystery, with potential links to classic murder mystery board games such as cluedo. Once we had the initial idea we delegated tasks to each other, my responsibilities were; character design/outfits, location scouting, script writing, film editing/cinematography and the direction of the film. Our first filming went dreadfully. All six actors and directors met up at my group members house, and we got next to nothing done. The main issue there was a lack of clear direction, we didn't have a script, relying only on a rough storyboard and the idea that we could just 'wing it' because it 'couldn't be that hard'. All of the footage we recorded on that day ended up being unusable anyways. So next time we filmed we came in much more prepared with a detailed script and a storyboard. This time the process went much more smoothly. We recorded a large amount of usable footage, buthad to skip over some very important parts because of our time restrictions on our drivers license with stopped us from recording past around 9:30pm. The problems began when we tried to organise the next filming session to try and film the rest of the footage that we missed. Due to our poor timing, Mock exams were about to happen, and people were working part-time jobs so NO ONE could make it to filming on the same day. After about 100 different conversations trying to organise this, the deadline approached quickly. We ended up having to substitute the missing footage with voice overs and scenic shots to cover for the lack of visuals. Of course, this took away from the film quite a bit. Since we waited so long to try and get the filming organised, it left me with one night to edit the entire film, which also took away from the overall quality of the film.

Representation of social/issues (major)

Within our film Host, in the closing moments it is revealed that the killer ends up being the Girlfriend. This contradicts social norms as in most thrillers'/murder mysteries, it is usually a man. Furthermore, we chose to use the representation of nepotism because it's a pressing issue in modern media. We show this through the mise-en-scene of the characters, as they are all wearing nice clothing – not to mention the setting, which is a mansion, further implying the social class of the cast. Our point was, despite all of that wealth handed down, it does not make one immune or above violence and crime, which is often thought as a quality of the lower class. When in reality, all of that talk is just that, talk. No one human is above another and our movie shows the grim reality that this could really happen to anyone, so maybe its best to be prepared. Another theme we explored was mental heath issues in young people. The motive behind the murders was primarily jealously to an extreme, as she saw the friends as competition and felt like she absolutely had to retaliate. This not only represents her mental struggles clearly but highlights the ever-present issue of youth mental health. When you are young, you imprint on those who raise you. A childhood filled with potential domestic violence or social isolation can

cause young people to make extreme decisions, like in our film when the girlfriend decides to murder all of her boyfriends' friends in cold blood.

How did we create a sense of branding?

Our short film, Host, we utilised constant motifs like dim lighting and character mise-en-scene to create a strong sense of uniformity and branding. I also used the same colours, fonts, and visual design throughout the production. This has carried through to our marketing too. My version of the postcard advertisement featured large red 'Host' text in the same font as seen within the movie and the credits, this helps to create a consistent visual motif for the viewers, and clearly displays our movies name. furthermore, the postcard advertisement is also dimly lit and supposed to be in conformity with the rest of our branding. These are also thriller/murder mystery films conventions that we followed, which could potentially lend us a more 'offical' look – depending on how you interpret of course.

How we challenged typical genre conventions

Within the thriller and murder mystery genres, we aim to subvert/challenge a few core conventions. For the murder mystery genre, we opted to make the main killer a woman, since we noticed that most of them are men, or at least have a male accomplice. Furthermore, we also decided to turn the often slow paced genre on its head with a series of fast paced kills and deductions to fit our short film brief. As for thriller conventions, we made the setting a sleek, modern house. This is in stark contrast to the crack dens and completely dilapidated houses that feature in some thriller films. We also wanted to portray the event happening to those who are clearly in the upper echelons of society. We noticed that a good amount of the time, thriller movie are often set in the mid to low income sections of society, this could be to make the movie more realistic or relatable, but we decided to throw that out the window in the pursuit of sending a message. We wanted to convey the fact that these sort of tragic and deranged events could happen to anyone, no matter the class, as we believe that the lower to middle classes are overrepresented when it comes to crime etc. overall I would say we were successful in how we challenged genre conventions and we hope that it showed in our film.

Engagement with audience (major)

We think that young people (aged 18-21) generally enjoy seeing movies that scare them (thriller) but also are mentally stimulating enough to encourage at least a surface level of thoughtful analysis into the films plot. A great example of this is A24's "Backrooms" (2026) which has a skilful blend of scary moments and interesting and enigmatic plot points that provoke a higher level of thinking other than just what's in front of them. We tackled that aspect of modern cinema by adopting a classic murder mystery sub-genre. We tried to use the typical conventions of the murder mystery genre such as; building suspense, dim lighting, somewhat

detailed characters with a least a little depth (for most of the earlier characters that die quickly, a lot of that 'depth' is portrayed through mise-en-scene with their outfits). Another key factor is the ages and social status of our characters and actors. Nowadays, young people follow the daily lives of rich socialites, and some aspire to achieve that same level of wealth. We utilised this in our film by portraying young characters that are of that higher class to engage with what our target audience tend to view online. Furthermore, an issue with our casting and character choices is that we lacked diversity. Our actors are all of the same New Zealand European ethnicity and therefore don't reflect the local audience. this choice wasn't of our volition, rather a result of the restrictions placed upon us by the intricate social life that comes with being a high-school student in the current era.

In conclusion, the whole process was often times fun, and can definitely be highly rewarding, however, in the end I found it overly stressful to try and organise and direct a group of five high-school teenagers to try and make a coherent film. Looking back, I can see with certainty that we chose a far too demanding topic, not only out of our actors, but also from me and my group. A murder mystery requires a long portion of time dedicated to just setting up and introducing character backgrounds and leaving small hints. To try and tackle that in a short film, with high school students? The brief was never going to be easy. However, I think we did our best with what we had, never mind the chaos and all nighters spent editing it at the last possible second – I'm proud with what we managed to create regardless. Thank you.