

What is the soul? Do we, as humans, have such a concept within us? Near us? Is the soul part of physical existence or merely an objective notion created to appease the masses and justify existence? Though I cannot claim to know the answer to any of these quandaries, I attempted to defy convention with my own explanation.

In a video narrative, I brought together my views on the human soul based upon the book I am writing, *Splitters*. This process began in 2007 when I began writing the book and has evolved with me as I have transitioned to my adult self. Originally, the project was going to be the first fifteen minutes of the film. The process of book to film conversion was very confusing, especially since the idea was constantly changing. Before plunging headlong into my new story, it became increasingly important to solidify my concepts. Where did my notions come from? How does this represent me as a person, and conversely apply to humanity as a whole? It occurred to me that in order to convey my story, I had to decide what I considered a soul. This project was an exploration of the idea of a soul, and using the medium of video narrative I conveyed the concepts of duality, humanism, fate versus free will, and the notion of choice.

To begin a project this expansive was overwhelming. Pre-production itself was complex enough without worrying about context and origins. I became lost in my story, rewriting it several times and dwelling on character development and overlaying themes. I made several storyboards, but since the story was constantly changing in rewrites, the storyboards became obsolete. I became frustrated by the circular patterns: make a storyboard, rewrite the story, make a new storyboard that leads to new ideas for a new rewrite, etc. I needed to take a step back and think of what led me to this point in order to retain my sanity.

When I was about ten years old I was forced to attend Catechism, a sort of religious summer school for Christians. Generally I spent the days doodling and not really listening. However, there was one lecture that really caught my attention. The nun lecturer went up to the ancient blackboard and took a piece of chalk. She drew a circle on the board and claimed that this was what our souls were like. With staccato chalk marks,

the nun drew little white blemishes on the “soul.” Each of those marks, she explained, represented sin. She then paused dramatically and picked up the eraser. And when you go to confession she continued, erasing all the blemishes, when you go to confession, your soul is clean again. The class sat in stunned silence. I took this drawing to heart and it was rooted in my young mind. I dwelled on this for years, wondering where those ruined bits of soul go. And that was how the concept of *Splitters* was born.

A Splitter is a being created from bits of a person’s soul. These pieces come from doing either great evil or great good. A Splitter is then the opposite of its Donor (or the person whose soul deviated). If the person sinned a great deal in their lifetime, enough to create a Splitter, then that Splitter would be innocent and pure. The idea behind this is that when sinning, you are losing the good bits of your soul. And when doing good, you are getting rid of the bad parts. When a Splitter is first created, they are androgynous in every sense of the word. In their alternate reality, they get to choose their species and gender. On a subconscious level I think that most people ponder the notion of choice, and wonder if they had been given one in this life. Again, this leads to my personal views of the soul.

It is my personal belief that everyone and everything has a soul. I believe that a soul is the representation of a being; it is indestructible, but not infallible. I am unsure of the concepts of heaven and hell, mostly feeling that they are human-made concepts to create order in chaos and give meaning to the harshness of life. Since I feel that the soul is indestructible, and following that matter is neither created nor destroyed, the soul has to go somewhere after parting with the body. I wholeheartedly believe in reincarnation. Of course these are all my own speculations through observances in my life. I have never thought that only one religion got it right, and have always been open-minded. With my piece, I hope to open minds and help to shatter non-cognitive conformity. The church was not the only influence for my piece, as I have found several other references in my life and other works.

I have never thought to discount any story-telling medium, but it was with great surprise that I found an incredibly deep concept in a video game. The game was called *Kingdom Hearts II*, and the main character, Sora, has a part of his heart destroyed by creatures known as “the Heartless.” When his heart is destroyed, an alternate version of

himself is created called a Nobody. This Nobody resembles their original counterpart, but is a different person. This concept helped fuel my own and helped me to form the aspects of a Splitter.

A more compelling reference came to my attention involving a tribe in South America called the Shipibo. This Amazonian tribe believes that there is a finite amount of good and evil in the world, and all one can do is shift it around. This is interesting because I discovered this tribe years after I had been developing the ideas of balance in the *Splitters* world. Whether doing great good or great evil, a person can create a *Splitter*, and this is where the story started to fall into place.

The story of *Splitters* is as split as the title implies. One half of the story focuses on what we consider “reality,” centering on a teenaged girl named Gail who faced a terrible childhood and became a miscreant of society. As we watch her life struggle onward, we turn to our second character. The second half focuses on a strange character named Lai. This character is neither male nor female, and is created from fragments of Gail’s damaged soul. Lai lives in a sort of parallel dimension to our own, never knowing what it is to feel, but still catching transparent wisps of feelings gathered from Gail’s spirit. At first, Lai discovers the beginning of “it’s” life and notices immediately that the world is a dark and painful place. Originally, the short film would have ended with Lai having to make a choice... a choice that would finally determine Lai’s species and gender, giving the newly anointed “him” a place. However, since I feel that I have a personal obligation to further investigate my feelings of what a soul is, the technical and final end products have changed.

The final project consisted of two parts, which is ironic, considering the subject matter. The first part was a five-minute piece on what I believe the soul is by using an investigation of my own views compared to others, a personal visual representation, and an introspective look at my own life in relation to my ideals. The second half was a five-minute trailer for *Splitters*. Each character was analyzed through video and the actors that I cast were the first to help me to start to bring my concept to life. Together, these pieces will help me to solidify my ideas for the book and help me stop waffling between notions. It is my greatest hope that the soul piece will be controversial. That way, engaging

conversations will be started and the seed of my idea will be planted into various minds to spread and grow out of control.

Both pieces were shot with a high quality HD camera. The equipment was rented from the Duderstadt video center, including lighting kits and high-end microphones. Back in September, I sent out a poster with a request for cast and crew and received a favorable response in both regards. Actors were auditioned on the 17 and 19 of December 2009 after a deep combing for characters that fit my inner vision, such as Kendall Chappell who I cast for the main character Lai. She has eyes that are just like the character, and it was an exciting find. Unfortunately, there was a vast amount of miscommunication on her part, and I had to let her go. I replaced Kendall with a last minute audition from a hometown friend, Taylor Hatheway. Taylor ended up looking the part, but was incredibly green-horned in acting for the camera. However this was only the beginning of the problems.

Weather was an overbearing factor, considering a majority of Michigan school semesters are spent in the snow. Patiently I had to bide my time, waiting for the perfect moment to send out my actors. Once the weather was just right (or as good as I could allow with time constraints), shooting also became an interesting experience. For the first time I had auditioned actors who raptly gave me their attention, hanging on to my direction with bated breath. It was a glorious moment of self-realization; a power surged through me at the pure bliss I felt while realizing my vision. And though I ran into a plethora of problems, it all worked out in the end.

This project was a personal journey towards the idea of a soul, and using *Splitters* I conveyed the concepts of duality, humanism, fate versus free will, and the notion of choice. It is my hope that this piece will awe and inspire viewers into thinking more deeply about their own values. After all, we are all united in our being human and beings of Earth. But what happens when you take away the familiar? What happens when you take away the conventional? What happens when you empathize with someone who cannot feel? Then maybe, just maybe, we can begin to shake the dust from our minds and start to think of fresh ideas once more.