A primer on aesthetic and technical differences recording location sound for dramatized audio works vs. standards for film
When I was first in film school, it became clear to me that my ideas were too ‘big’ to ever be realized as film unless I was insanely lucky. When I discovered audio drama, I found a medium that combine the elements I loved most about filmmaking – the collaborative production process, the energy of performance – with a leaner format that allowed sweeping hour-plus productions to be created for an economy of effort. With a few brushstrokes of sound, you can place your audience in the future or distant past, or send them to Venice, Africa, or the moon.

This e-book is designed to complement mainstream texts on dialogue editing and location recording such as John Purcell’s masterful “Dialogue Editing for Motion Pictures” and Ric Viers’ “The Location Sound Bible.” It is not intended to be a wide survey of the available recording options, microphone choices or an advanced treatise on bit-rate, frequency response, or other technical choices.

Rather, my aim here is to highlight considerations that a professional field recordist trained in film sound should know when taking on an audio drama project. The toolbox between audio drama and film sound is quite similar, and in fact, recording location sound in an audio production is easier in many ways - if profoundly harder in others.

Ultimately my goals is to assure you that recording audio drama on location is not as difficult nor as insane an idea as it may first appear (though there are certainly insane moments). By untethering your cast from the confines of the studio, you can create more intimate moments, more dramatic struggles and fresher soundscapes than is otherwise possible. Field recording allows you to fully embrace the potential of our “theater of the imagination.”
The elements of audio drama

A successful audio drama starts with a good script.

If you’re the sound guy, you probably don’t have much to do with the script, but, it’s important to understand the key ingredients to the writing so you can understand your role in the bigger process. While a bad script will take down any production, it’s especially difficult to save yourself from bad words in an audio drama because words are all you have.

The basic toolset in an audio drama is:
- Narration
- Dialogue
- Sound effects
- Music
- Silence

Narration
Opinions go back and forth as to the best role for a narrator in audio drama. Generally, less is more, though the nature of your script will influence whether a narrator is a boon or overbearing. Detective stories, for instance, have a long-standing convention of a first-person, protagonist narrator, which works well for highlighting details in a scene without feeling heavy-handed. The same narrator can feel very awkward in a personal drama, where the heart of a scene really should be developed through interpersonal dialogue.

Generally any narrator should be recorded in-studio so we will omit talking more about narrators in this text.

Dialogue
Dialogue is the heart of the what and why of recording on-location. You will almost always get cleaner dialogue tracks in the studio. In fact, most field dialogue for films is thrown out and replaced with ADR. So why would you go through the trouble of dragging actors to remote locations if the visuals of them in that location are not important?

Three reasons:
- More convincing performances, particularly out of film actors
- Acoustically match output reverb without further processing
- Ability to stage action in live-space for more interesting scenes
Of these three reasons, the performance aspect bears the most mention, both because it is not as obvious a benefit, and because it is the most important.

Convolution-reverb plugins like Altiverb can be magical at making actors sound like they were recorded anywhere. FinalRune has done especially well produced our own impulse-responses (thanks to the advice of our sound designer, Matthew Boudreau, of Aural Stage Studios). We’ll talk more about convolution-reverb later.

What’s important to note is that there is a difference between getting clean lines, and getting performed lines in an audio drama. All sorts of small details – paralanguage, breathing, small reactions from characters who are overhearing dialogue (but is not called for in the script) contribute to a scene feeling like it’s alive.

In the studio, you can certainly push for this, but especially when all actors are recorded separately on monomics, there is a physical obstruction (the microphone) keeping the actors from making eye-contacting and truly performing against each other.

An improvement is to record in studio with actors ensemble around an X-Y stereo pair (as Dirk Maggs of Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy and Neverwhere fame does). Even better, in our opinion, is to record with a single stereo mic (more on this later), which means you are completely untethered. Actors can run, duck, grapple, embrace.

A group of actors get carried away doing ‘walla walla’ in FinalRune’s “Waiting for a Window.”

The main dialogue was recorded with the Rode NT-4 XY stereo microphone, though a Zoom H2 in stereo mode was used as a backup mic for the crowd scenes.

I’ve since learned to keep crowd scenes ‘clean’ and record dialogue separately so you have more control over scenes in post.

It may seem a bit extreme, but FinalRune recorded actors for all water scenes in The Cleansed in the water. Again, we recommend minimizing spot sound effects (paddling noises) but the sense of actors moving in the space is extremely convincing. Moments after the photo to the left was taken, we tossed the canoe and got very nice sounds of the actress screaming as she goes under water (the scene consists of the actors as they descent a rugged set of whitewater rapids, and a canoe accident is part of the storyline).

Getting a similar level of sheer terror and adrenaline in the studio is hard.
In the USA, you will rarely find an actor who has ever performed in an audio drama before. As such, they will tend to bring an acting toolkit optimized for theatre, film, or audiobooks before. Of the three, the film background is the most analogous – the actors need to be brought “up” quite a bit from film, where the camera captures all the nonverbal subtleties, but the general principle of delivering dialogue naturally is very helpful in audio drama. Actors from the stage can have a tendency to project too much, until they built up microphone skills, and audiobooks narrators need to be pushed to perform rather than read.

The point in saying this, is that by subjecting the actors to real-world conditions – putting them in a beach, house, car, spooky wood, or old castle, you will tend to get the film ‘effect’ on their performance. A certain amount of the psychological space needed from the acting experience will be reinforced naturally by the choice of location. This takes some weight off the director and actor both; both more quickly slip in the appropriate mindspace to give their top performance.

The other aspect to this, is that you as the sound recordist are a collaborative aspect of the performance. Unlike film, where sound is a distant cousin to video, the sound is the whole point of the endeavor in an audio drama. That means that you can start to think creatively about the mic placement and the movement of actors and the microphone through space.

I tend to think in film metaphors “wide shot” “close-up” “extreme close-up” etc. when thinking about how to place the microphone. You don’t have to worry about the damn camera! Stick the microphone right up in an actor’s face. Have them deliberately go off-mic for dramatic effect. Use doors and other portals to transition through space for delicious moments of movement that are close to impossible to otherwise produce. Have fun.

In audio drama, the microphone is a true collaborator in the creative process. Use it.

Great actors will do great work wherever they are. But it can help to push them physically. Actors sound different when they are sitting, standing, crouching. The microphone can pick up the subtle vocal changes as an actor changes position, which are some of the most intimate and realistic moments in location recorded audio drama.
Sound Effects

Good sound effects in audio drama can be as much a character as the characters themselves. A good script will know how to use them properly, e.g.

JOE: Sally, watch out for that gunshot!
SALLY: What?
SFX: BANG!
SALLY: Oh tarnation!

Is pretty dreadful. Better:

JOE: Sally, down!
SALLY: What?
SFX: BANG!
JOE grabs SALLY and they both hit the ground
SALLY: Thank God, you saved me. Who the hell is shooting at us?
JOE: Some guy. Up there I think?
SALLY: Up where?
SFX: BANG
JOE: Dammit, stay down!

Keeps the action flowing.

Music

Not really the domain of the location sound guy, but music can be your friend. You will of course work very hard to ensure your tracks do not have planes, trains, gunshots, chainsaws, refrigerators, diesel trucks, heavy equipment, off-stage coughing, overheard cell phone conversations, random slammed doors, or other troublesome noises.

But, should through extreme events outside of your control some extraneous sound make it into your tracks, music can be very helpful in covering mistakes in the original audio.

Silence

Is golden.

Take the opportunity to gather interesting field sound whenever you can. We have always been pressed for time on my sets and wished we had more time to collect interesting spot FX on the locations we’ve used.

Minimally, you’ll want to gather a bunch of room tone. One way of doing this, is simply to hold 30 seconds prior to starting a scene (Between when recordist stays ‘rolling’ and director says ‘action’) so that the dialogue editor has some stuff to play with without forcing a dedicated track.

It can be hard to corral your actors, so taking a few extra seconds when they’re already in ‘go’ mode means you’re less likely to forget to record tone later, or to
Recording Dialogue

The most important thing you will do on location.

The only reason you are going on location is to record spectacular dialogue tracks. If you fail to do this, you would be better off staying home. This chapter attempts to talk through the most common issues recording audio drama on location so you can learn from some of our mistakes.

Scouting

Just as a production’s success is often a reflection of how much time was spent in pre-production, the success of a day recording on location is often the reflection of good location scouting.

You can’t prepare for every eventuality, but on the bright side you as the recordist have much greater say than you would on a film shoot. You’re not locked in to shooting during a ‘golden hour’ and you have a much wider weather window to record in. You also may not even be locked into day or night scenes depending on how the ambience of your location varies based on time of day.
It’s very difficult to get the 21st century out of your production, which is, honestly, why many sound engineers hate recording on location and prefer the safety (and soundproofing) of the studio.

Properties to look for in a good location include:

- **Relative quiet** – The most important feature. Is the location near major flight paths? Where are the neighbors in relation to you? Do any of them use loud equipment during the times of days you’ll be recording? How far away is the nearest road? Train station? You can use ambient features to your advantage, but make sure the use is intentional.

- **Access** – You can record in many public places for free, but that won’t stop random people from gawking at you, or worse, coming up and asking questions. It’s best to record somewhere where you have clear permission and some ability to protest if an interested party butts in asking what you’re up.

- **Interesting features** – A lot of acoustically untreated rooms can some quite boomy, which is nice for dramatic effect in small doses, but you generally want at least one relatively ‘dead’ space, or a space you can condition to dead a little bit with the use of sound blankets and/or acoustic foam. More fun – stairwells, access to a relatively quiet outdoor location, basements, crawlspaces, attics... And for outdoor locations, really it’s just getting away from the heavy machinery that’s key.

- **Facilities** – If you go to Antarctica, it’ll probably be quiet (except for the penguins) but your cast could get cranky. Access to a green room, restroom facilities, and basic coffee/tea service can really help on those long recording days. Actors love wi-fi, too.

Ideally you’ll be able to get room tone from every scene and every room at your location, as well as good IRs. Realistically, recording day is insane and you may not get everything you want. It’s a good idea to bring gear with you on the recording trip and do some room tone recording and maybe gather some IRs while you’re at it. We’ll talk about worldizing and IRs a bit later.
OK, let's get to the good stuff!

You've got a location, you've got a cast, now it's time to MAKE STUFF.

The next question, then – what to pack and bring with me?

There are two points I want to make that go against the conventions of most film sound:

- You should record in stereo
- You should record using a single mic and not bother using lavs

OK. Now to defend myself

Mono vs. Stereo

Look, I know the reasoning. A mono mic rejects more off-axis noise and results in a nice clean sound which you can then manipulate in post to be panned left or right when you have more time to think about the project, rather than the heat of the production moment.

From a Producer's point of view, however, I like having fewer choices in post, assuming that the Director is on point and makes the right decision about how actors are staged in the recording process. But, that is the whole art of location recording. The POINT of this is that you are streamlining your post-production process and capturing a certain aesthetic with your dialogue tracks that you are going to continue to love even when the recording day is wrapped.

With a stereo mic, you effectively use the microphone as the “eye” of the camera and you have the ability to manipulate POV in your recording process for dramatic effect. Generally, you DO want the actors fairly tight together, and through mic placement will work to keep the actor talking on center or close to it throughout dialogue recording.

A stereo mic does a better job of capturing the whole ‘feel’ of a scene, so your use of environmental elements like narrow passageways, weird doors, or having your lovers run barefoot off into the distance all feel more convincing when recorded in stereo.

You could make a compelling argument for recording in MS stereo (either with a dedicated mic like the Sennheiser 418S or with a Schoeps pair or equivalent) however again, I’m lazy, I like making decisions during recording, and thus my favorite mics ‘print’ L/R stereo tracks.
Mono vs. Stereo, continued

My current favorite mic is the Sanken CSS-5 ($2,300), a favorite exotic stereo shotgun mic that can record in mono (the output a stereo file with identical L/R channels), narrow stereo (120 degrees), or wide stereo (140 degrees). The flexibility is helpful though honestly you never want to mess with your mic too much during a session; the narrow stereo mode was excellent for most situations, offering a reasonable balance between capturing ‘field sound’ and rejecting the stuff that’s way off in the weeds. Interestingly, the Sanken achieves the stereo sound by use of up to 5 different mic capsules which are activated depending on the setting you choose, and the matrixing occurs on the device.

My previous go-to mic (which, for 1/4 of the price sounds damn impressive) was the RODE NT4 ($530) which has incredibly clean sounding mic capsules, and a broader (nearly 360 degrees) pickup pattern. The sound quality of the RODE is fantastic and pairing it with an expensive recorder (like the Sound Devices 702 - $2,500) is not wildly mismatched. However, it is a heavier mic overall and the wider pickup pattern means you need to put more effort into ensuring your dialogue levels are clear and that you don’t pick up unwanted sounds.

On the mono compatibility front, an X-Y set-up or mid-side setup both offer excellent backwards compatibility (to the extent that it matters in 2015). Binaural recording is another option, and no dramatist has better explored what binaural recording can do for audio drama than ZBS’ Tom Lopez. However, binaural recording sacrifices the clarity of dialogue when playback is on loudspeakers, so as a rule I tend to prefer recording in a more conventional form of stereo.

Finally, while some dramatists (such as Dirk Maggs in Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy Books 3-5) have experimented with producing 5.1 Surround Sound mixes for audio drama, it is extraordinarily rare that the end user will ever have the technology to listen to a piece played back in this manner. As such, I think a properly mixed 2-track stereo production offers the best combination of playfulness available to the recordist and sound designer, and compatibility to its intended audience.

So why not use lav mics?

In audio drama field recording you will be subject to all kinds of crazy conditions – dealing with unwanted noise, working in complex scenes with actors moving around, fighting to get stuff recording as time is running out – so it seems like you would want to pull out all the tricks you can, and cover your butt in event that you inadvertently record an actor off-axis or have a line get some extraneous sound printed on it.

In film, you generally record both shotgun and individually lav actors. So why wouldn’t you do the same in audio drama? My reason is simple – KISS.

One of the major advantages of recording on location for audio drama is that you can move around quickly. You can change the way a scene is staged between takes, try one version with a character going up a flight of stairs, have a door manipulated in one take and not another, etc. Lav mic’ing adds an additional layer of complexity that hampers this part of the process.
The art of mic placement

Rather than rely on a lav mic to cover for your mistakes, you should aspire to record nice clean dialogue tracks in the first-place. I know – easier said than done.

An essential part of your kit is a lightweight fishpole and a blimp-style windscreens, same as you’d bring to a typical video shoot. You should be able to manipulate the mic placement while a scene is being recorded without making a sound. Indeed, that is your job – to be invisible, never audibly breathing, or belly gurgling, while the magic of the scene happens in front of you.

With a shotgun mic’s narrow focus, you need to take special effort to keep actors in ‘focus,’ generally by tipping the mic physically to face the actor who is currently speaking. You should ALWAYS keeps actors oriented in the same placement in the stereo axis (i.e. never have someone magically go from right to left without it being part of the scene) but you can ‘nudge’ someone who is biased slightly left to being more in center-focus by tipping the mic. This is really the only way to try and get everyone to stay present and on-mic in a field recorded audio drama. Also, don’t neglect just how much you need to stuff the mic right up in people’s faces. Hey, at least they don’t have to wear makeup for you.

Getting up close and personal is just the name of the game in audio drama

It can be tricky to keep everyone on-mic when you have a lot of characters in the scene, but it is going to sound a lot better with everyone on a close-up shotgun mic than if you try to mix and match stuff from lavs.
Page turns? What page turns?

If I were writing this in 2012, I would warned you to be cautious about page turns. A general safety for these is to make sure the script terminates at the bottom of each page and then let all actors finish lines, give a "beat," flip the page, then continue onward. The beat is removed in post.

As of 2015, however, just about everyone has a Tablet computer or access to one for the duration of your gig. Their ubiquity means that your script is most likely going to be read by the actors on a digital device during recording. This offers the wonderful advantage of not having to worry about page turns and saving a ton of money (and paper) at the print-shop, but it does introduce other issues like readability in bright sun and battery life. It's not a bad idea to keep your own tablet (probably 7" "mini" device) in your kit and to keep some USB battery packs around for the actor who inevitably will have a dying battery in the middle of an intense scene.

Fred's Field Recordist Checklist

- Stereo shotgun Microphone
- Mic cable (5-pin XLR)
- Boom pole (as light as possible!)
- Blimp-style windscreen w/ Deadcat
- Recorder (Highly recommend Sound Devices stuff, lower-end gear like Zoom H4n is OK but I tend to prefer the physically bigger devices like Marantz PMD-661 as you can get a shoulder strap and see levels as you record with the thing slung over your shoulder)
- Really good set of headphones
- Lots of extra batteries and memory cards

PA's bag:

- Healthy snacks like energy bars and apples
- Bottled water
- Clipboard w/ plenty of shot sheets (template provided in appendix)
- Day’s recording checklist (template provided in appendix)
- Pens & Highlighters
- Hard copy or two of script

Do Good Work

You cannot prepare for every eventually, but you should pack your bag like you can.

In general, you should be thrilled to have been chosen as recordist for an audio production. Unlike the film, YOU are the most important tech on the set, which means you are unfettered by the needs of the DP and can put the mic where the mic wants to be.
The Production Assistant

The person who keeps you from losing your mind.

There is a minimum 3 person crew on an audio drama: Director, Recordist, Production Assistant. It’s nice to have an additional Logistics person to get people fed and to corral schedules, freeing the PA to stick with the Director and Recordist all day, but, hey, let’s be realistic, a lot of audio dramas are shoe-string affairs.

The Production Assistant is there for two reasons: to help ‘gopher’ the Director as required, and to make sure that everything you record makes sense to the next person down the chain who listens to the tracks. Digital EDL’s do not make particular sense for an audio drama recording (anyone who wants to make a counter-argument email me: fred@finalrune.com) – instead, you are going to be writing this stuff down with plain ol’ PAPER.

My process is like this. We have a master spreadsheet which lists all of the scenes in the entire production tagged with TOD, location (called for in the script), characters in the scene, duration of scene, and location (where you will record the thing). From there, you can start to suss out how much time you’ll need at each location with your production team and begin coordinating schedules with actors. A full treatise on scheduling could be its own event, but, drop me an email sometime if you want to swap war stories.
So you have these two master documents: a spreadsheet with a list of all the scenes in the whole darn production, and a script (or series of scripts) with all of the scenes in them. Once you figure out what you want to record on a given day, you pull those individual scenes from the script, make a new “Daily” script and that is the PDF which you send around to all of your actors. This is generally the PA or Director’s job.

The rapport on your set may very, but it’s generally the Director’s job to keep track of what scenes you’re recording, in what order, and to make decisions about where to record them and how to stage the actors in those scenes. What I find, however, is that the recordist often plays a critical creative role in helping make these decisions and making suggestions about how to record a scene in different ways based on what I’m hearing in my headphones.

Generally, each scene goes: Director says, “OK, everyone ready? Roll” you roll, you say “Rolling” and then the Director (whispers) “Action” or maybe just points.

Your job is to listen extremely closely, and keep the microphone aimed where it should be. The PA’s job is to ensure that every line is recorded the way it should be, and log what track that appears on, and keeps good notes of what happens during each take. There are justifiable reasons why a line might be tweaked from the script, but, it should be noted and in all cases you should ensure a clean take of each line is recorded exactly as the writer wrote it.

It’s nice if you have a sound recorder that can log tracks in a meaningful format, i.e. “DAY1-TRACK001” etc. What I then do at the end of the day is dump all of the tracks in a folder named for that day’s recordings, and then the PA updates the master spreadsheet saying those tracks were recorded and noting on what day they were recorded.

With the properly filled-out shot sheet, an accurate tracking that the daily script was recorded exactly as it was supposed to, the sound recordist can feel confident that the next person in the production chain – the dialogue editor, has all the information they need to start their work.

And as you can tell, if the PA fails at this, it makes life harder for everyone!
Chapter 4

Post-production and studio stuff

So you’ve gone ahead and recorded some stellar, clean, dynamic and dramatic scenes – Bravo!

But now – whoops – we need to fit in another actor. What do we do?

Luckily, you recorded a whole bunch of IRs on location, right? Impulse Responses (IRs) are basically a signal sweep that helps software algorithmically apply a convolution-reverb process to emulate the acoustics of a room on a ‘dry’ studio track. There are a number of ways to produce these (and software maker Altiverb has some excellent videos on their website), just make sure YOU have a way that fits your production schedule and location availability.

Though you can fudge a scene with a stock IR from the manufacturer’s library, things are going to blend better when you use your own IRs that you’ve recorded on location.

The principles of ‘worldizing’ sound in audio drama are essentially the same as ADR for film, and, honestly a bit of the scope of what this book is about. Check out any number of fantastic tutorials on doing ADR work/worldizing on YouTube.

There are a lot of ways to generate Impulse Responses (IRs) but I love the Maine-made DemerBox, a high-fidelity, battery-powered boombox that connects to audio devices via Bluetooth. Load up your impulse response file to iPhone, connect the Demerbox, and hit playback – marking tracks accordingly and recording. The result is significantly better than even the best Altiverb libraries, because the acoustics will perfectly match the conditions of your recording.
Using IRs to convincingly ‘worldize’

This is more the sound designer’s world than the recordist, but IRs can also be used on the sound effects that need to be added to your production (everything from gunshots to door slams) so that those FX sound more natural in your scenes. A good sound designer will never use an effect just dry from the library; instead, they will modify the effect to make it their ‘own’ to some extent and to have it fit the overall aesthetic of the location sound you’ve created.

Ideally, as much of your production as possible will be created unique for your production, rather than pulled from libraries, especially the common free libraries for SFX (freesounds.org) and music (incompetech.com). As much as we love and support the open source movement and the concept of Creative Common, the reality is that a vast number of productions (for budgetary reasons) use only freely available effects, meaning they have been heard by audiences before. As a listener, nothing pulls me out of a show faster than hearing a piece of music or sound that I recognize from another production.

Using IRs with stock FX allows you to customize them for your own show, and also makes them uniquely yours. Worldizing sound effects is much the same as worldizing vocal tracks, if perhaps a bit easier since sound effects don’t need to meld with another performance.

If you’re still looking for things to do after you’ve recorded all the dialogue, you can talk with the sound designer and set up a foley session or two. A half-rotted pumpkin and an axe makes for a damn gruesome sound. Just watch out for splatter.

These catacombs under an 1800s textile mill provided an incredible rich and convincing ‘tunnel’ sound used extensively in our productions *The Cleansed* and *Locke and Key*, a production for Audible, Inc.
I hope you have the courage and creative determination to attempt creating a film without a camera. I have found the process incredibly liberating and the possibilities in the medium limitless.

Because so few people know that audio drama exists, you are free from established norms in terms of how a story is created. Create a story that zig-zags through time. Create a story where the inner world and outer world of your character melds and mish-mashes. Have an unreliable narrator. Do all the experimental stuff you imagined in film but never had the time and budget to do.

While recording in audio is still a lot of work, you can produce a fully fledged 30-60 minute audio drama in the same time it takes to make a 10 minute film*. Go out there and record anything you can imagine!

* At least I have – your mileage may vary!
Appendices:

Field recording checklist
To-record Sheet Example
Sample script
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<td>1-06</td>
<td>INT. CORRIDOR</td>
<td>MICHELLE, FRANK</td>
<td>7-8</td>
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<td>INT. U-HAUL TRUCK</td>
<td>JIM, ROBERT</td>
<td>8-9</td>
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<td>EXT. SUMMER HOUSE</td>
<td>BODE, KINSEY, TYLER</td>
<td>9-9</td>
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<td>INT. SUMMER HOUSE</td>
<td>JOE, JANE</td>
<td>9-10</td>
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<td>JIM, ROBERT</td>
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<td>EXT. HOUSE</td>
<td>JOE, JANE</td>
<td>11-12</td>
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<td>MICHELLE, FRANK</td>
<td>14-15</td>
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<td>1-16</td>
<td>INT. CELL BLOCK</td>
<td>ROBERT</td>
<td>15-17</td>
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</table>

**NOTES:** The Page # is usually updated to correspond to the daily shooting script, so the Director can bounce around between scenes to be recorded that Day and actors can quickly find the scene. The Episode naming convention in this case reflects a series (Character names and Settings fictionalized). So we have a format EPISODE#-SCENE## e.g. 1-01 refers to Episode 1, scene 1.

If you know you’ll be recording on location, it’s really helpful if the writer splits up narration and dialogue scenes into separate scenes (by ##) in the script. There are a variety of script templates out there, from MS Word to Movie Magic Screenwriter to Final Draft to Celtx.

It doesn’t really matter what scriptwriting software you use (Audio drama is far less rigid than film) so long as the script itself is clear enough that any actor can pick it up the first time and understand how to follow it.

This template is obviously for a finished production as you see how it gets updated as the process moves forward.

Example Audio Drama Recording Log Template courtesy of FinalRune Productions
THE CLEANSED - SEASON 1

EPISODE 1 – THE REFUGE

An original audio drama by
Frederick Greenhalgh

Here audio for this sequence (indeed, the whole season) at:
https://soundcloud.com/finalrune/sets/the-cleansed-season-1
SUMMARY

Fifteen years after the dreadful unmaking of society in the pilot, we find ourselves in the city of Corinth, where John Prophet has been overthrown in a coup. John Prophet narrowly escapes capture in the sewers, sacrificing his adopted son Zeke. Prophet flees to the Refuge, the off-grid outpost where David, Sam, and the survivors from Ep. 0 have been living in the 15 years since the Breaking. Two youths, Luke and Maria, pine for adventure, and when they see Prophet arrive, they see their opportunity, while their parents see danger.

CAST

LUKE 20-yr. old w/ troubled past, born in Refuge
JOHN Troubled soldier, fallen leader of Corinth
ZEKE Follower of son, a de facto adopted son
REBEL 1, 2, 3 Rebels loyal to John
REPUBLIC 1, 2, 3 Officers of the New Republic
MAFIA 1, 2 Mafia members who smuggle John out of Corinth
MARIA Sam’s daughter, smart, tough tomboy with a gun
DAVID Leader of the Refuge, kind but toughened
CHRIS David’s old friend, soldier
JAKE Survivor at Refuge, awkward but he tries
JONAS The Refuge’s doctor
CARL Grumpy old timer at the Refuge
SAM Tough ex-soldier, only hardened by 15 yrs.
CHAD Leader of the Dwellers
DWELLER 1 One of the Dwellers
SAUL 2x agent for Prophet & Republic, Cult leader
DANIEL Political head of the New Republic
RICHARD Military head of the New Republic

SETTINGS

Tunnels of Republic
Refuge - outskirts & interiors
Republic meeting hall

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THE CLEANSED: EPISODE 1

MUSIC: RISE UP THEME, CREDITS, THEN FADE TO...

SCENE 1 - INT. TUNNELS OF REPUBLIC, EARLY MORNING

(Zeke, Abraham, John, Rebels, Republic, Mafia)

A TUNNEL LEADING TO THE CITADEL OF THE REPUBLIC... SEVERAL SOLDIERS ARE MOVING ALONG AT A STEADY CLIP

MUSIC: DANGER, SUSPENSE, DRAMATIC.

ZEKE: John, someone’s behind us!

JOHN: Quiet Zeke.

ABRAHAM: It’s okay, we’re close.

JOHN: Will the train be ready to go?

ABRAHAM: I sure hope so.

JOHN: Right. (A BIT LOUDER) Come on everyone, keep moving.

REBELS: (AFFIRMATIVE) Yes sir! Come right along!

Etc.

SOUND: THEY TAKE A FEW MORE STEPS, THEN HEAR A FAR OFF BANGING.

REBEL 2: What’s that?!

JOHN: (LOCKS AND LOADS) Hold up, lay low!

REBEL 3: I heard --
JOHN: Quiet! (BEAT) We got incoming.

ABRAHAM: How could they - not this fast, we should have an hour, maybe more.

ZEKE: What’s happening John?

JOHN: Quiet, Zeke! Everyone stay calm. We can get to the train, it’s only about 100 yards past this corner.

REBEL 2: Too late!

SFX: SOMEONE STARTS FIRING

JOHN: For God’s sakes, calm down! Zeke, have you seen Saul?

ZEKE: No...

JOHN: Where the hell is he? He was supposed to be here with supplies -

REBEL 1: Up ahead!

SFX: JOHN’S REBEL FORCES START FIRING AT RANDOM,

THE ONCOMING GUARDS START TO FIRE BACK

JOHN: Everyone! Stop firing and keep moving! We need to get away!

REBEL 1: They’re coming, John, they’re coming!

ABRAHAM: I can see it!
JOHN: Zeke, come on! Move your feet!

ZEKE: Yes, John --

SFX: POP, POP OF GAS CANISTERS BEING LAUNCHED

MEN START HACKING

REBEL 2: Gas!

JOHN: MOVE!

SFX: JOHN STARTS TO RUN BUT THERE IS UTTER CHAOS

AMONG HIS TROOPS, THEY’RE FIRING AT RANDOM

AND WITH NO ORDER. REPUBLIC HITS A FEW AND

SOMEONE SCREAMS. IN THE MIDST OF THE CHAOS,

WE HEAR THE REPUBLIC YELL.

REPUBLIC 1: (OFF) Careful with that fire! There’s nukes in those trains!

REPUBLIC 2: Push, push!

SFX: THE REPUBLIC FORCES THEIR WAY FORWARD, AND

STARTS BASHING IN THE REBEL FORCES WITH RIOT GEAR

JOHN: Run, Zeke!

ABRAHAM: John, come on! There’s no time!

JOHN: But ZEKE! ZEEEK!

SOUND: A SCREECHING, UNEXPECTED ALARM, HISS OF

SPRINKLER SYSTEM
65 REBEL 1: Ahhh!!! AHHH!!!

66 REBEL 2: It burns, it burns!!

67 SOUND: FROM UP AHEAD BULLETS START TO FIRE OFF...

68 OTHER REBELS CRY IN FEAR OR PAIN

69 ZEKE: They’re flanking us!

70 JOHN: Dammit, let’s fight then!

71 REPUBLIC 1: (AMPLIFIED) You’re cornered, Prophet, throw down your guns!

72 SOUND: JOHN FIRES OFF A FEW ROUNDS.

73 JOHN: The hell with you!

74 REPUBLIC 1: Your men don’t have to die!

75 SOUND: HIS SOLDIERS ARE STARTING TO LOSE FAITH IN THEIR OWN SKILL

76 JOHN: Don’t listen to them, keep fighting!

77 REBEL 2: We can’t do this, they’ve got us!

78 JOHN: For God’s sakes grow some balls!

79 SOUND: MORE FIREFIGHT...

80 REBEL 2: They’re storming us!

81 REBEL 3: Fall back! Fall back!

82 JOHN: No! Don’t! Dammit, stay put!

83 HIS SOLDIERS FALL BACK ANYWAYS.
86 JOHN: Dammit!

87 SOUND: A LOUD KI-KRACK! HITS A NEARBY REBEL

88 REBEL 2: Agghhh!

89 JOHN: Stay together! Stay together!

90 SOUND: BLASTS CONTINUE TO RAIN UPON THEM

91 ABRAHAM: Help! John! Help!

92 JOHN: I’m coming!

93 JOHN RUSHES TO WHERE ABRAHAM IS STRANDED

94 ZEKE: John, where are you going?!

95 JOHN: This train has to leave the station!

96 ZEKE: Wait up!

97 JOHN: For God’s sakes fight, Zeke. This train can’t wait for anyone!

99 ZEKE: John!

100 JOHN: Fight!

101 THE REPUBLIC GUARDS OVERTAKE ZEKE AND BEGIN TO WAIL ON HIM. ZEKE’S HOWLS ARE HEARD DOWN THE TUNNEL

103 ZEKE: JOHN! JOHHNN! JOHHHHNNN!

104 REPUBLIC 2: Where’d Prophet go?

105 REPUBLIC 1: He’s still going!

106 POV REFOCUSES TO PROPHET, WHO’S CHARGING UP TO A TRAIN
JOHN: Abraham! Are you ready?

ABRAHAM: (PANTING) I just... got on...

JOHN: I’ve got - I gotta grab Zeke -

ABRAHAM: There’s no time - you’ve got to get on.

JOHN: But Zeke!

ABRAHAM: I can’t protect myself John! Please

SFX: TRAIL SQUEALS.

JOHN: DAMMIT!

TRAIN DOOR FLINGS OPEN AND SOMEONE SHOUTS

MAFIA 1: You coming or what?!

JOHN: Okay!

JOHN DASHES ABOARD THE TRAIN

MAFIA 1: Okay! Fire her up!

ZEKE: John! Please help me, John! JOHN!

SFX: DOOR SLAMS SHUT, TRAIN BURBLES TO A START

REPUBLIC 1: Down! All of you pissheads down! That means you!

ZEKE: John! JOHN!!!

SOUND: ZEKE’S CRIES RISE UP INTO THE WHINE OF THE TRAIN AS IT EXITS

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