



The Plot Twist

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Pearl is an alien sent to Earth to help humans find love. Working undercover as a barista, the logically-minded Pearl is bored playing cupid. Then she meets a human named Mark, and suddenly, Pearl experiences these strange feelings that could mean she's falling in love.

That's the plot of *The Pearl Equation*, a short concept film being shot by Chicago-based director Vedant Naik.

"It's the biggest thing I've done. I have a director of photography, producer and more, and we're in the casting phase right now," said Naik, 23.

But Naik's life has a plot twist of its own: His parents, who live in India, know little about his budding filmmaking career. They think he's focused on finishing his business degree and working as a copywriter.

"My parents didn't encourage me to pursue it. I listened to them because I thought they knew better than me," Naik said.

Currently residing in the Boystown neighborhood in Chicago, Naik, an international student from Mumbai, works as a full-time copywriter at Tom, Dick and Harry Creative. He is also pursuing a master's degree in business development at DePaul University, where he previously completed his undergraduate studies, majoring in advertising and public relations with a minor in screenwriting.

If it wasn't for his dog, Peaches, Vedant Naik claims he may not have been here today due to the depression he suffered in what was a tough 2015 for him.





Vedant looks over one of the many scripts he has written over the course of his four years at DePaul.

However, he initially wanted to study in the United States to follow his dream of becoming a filmmaker – something he’s wanted to do ever since growing fascinated by *The Lord of the Rings* as a child.

Naik got his first taste of actual filmmaking during an English literature class where he had to produce a modern take on *Romeo and Juliet*.

“Our professor showed us *Romeo and Juliet* and said we’d have to film our own take on it,” Naik said. “I borrowed a camcorder from the school library and essentially turned the movie into a World War II love story between a German and a Jew. It was a fun experience and I realized this was something I really enjoyed doing.”

Naik aced the project and was told by his professor that his work stood out. But Naik’s parents weren’t happy with his dream career, preferring that he went into another field, such as business, to improve his chances of getting a well-paying job.

Staying on Script

In high school, his parents made him take business, information technology and environmental management instead of the classes Naik wanted to take, such as drama and history. They also didn’t want him to go to the United States, instead, preferring places like Hong Kong, Singapore and the United Kingdom for their business courses. However, Naik was at least given the choice as to where he’d end up studying and chose DePaul in Chicago.

“Whenever I didn’t listen to my parents, it panned out badly, so I ultimately became an advertising student,” Naik said.

Despite finding enjoyment as an advertising major in the latter years of his college experience, Naik initially fought back against his parents, not wanting to give up on his childhood dream of becoming a filmmaker.

“That was when I got my first real criticism. I realized I wasn’t as good as I thought I was – which is exactly why I should go to film school to become better. This was also down to one of my friends who told me to stick to what I believe in,” he said.

Rishab Rao, 22, was one of those friends who roomed with Naik at DePaul.

“All I told him was he needed to make up his mind,” Rao said. “He needed to figure out whether this [filmmaking] was what he wanted to do and if he wanted to, he had to put in 200 percent. In my honest opinion, he had room for a lot of improvement but I could clearly see he was passionate about it,” Rao said.

Meanwhile, Naik said his relationship with his parents deteriorated after freshmen year.

“At that time, I had given up on the dream of filmmaking,” he said. “My conversations with my parents were always a screaming contest. I didn’t go home for a year and a half and I felt like my parents were trying to invade my life and control it even though they were on the other side of the world.”

“My parents did give in though and were like, ‘if you’re so sure you can get a job doing filmmaking, go for it’. At that point, I was like, oh snap, I can actually do film now. But can I get a job? Maybe I should listen to them one last time,” Naik said.

Naik obeyed his parents but still found time to pursue his passion in his free time by making movies during his undergraduate career.

However, getting their approval was not the only struggle that Naik has had to endure.

With his father working as a branch manager, and his mother working as a bank clerk, Naik had to live with his grandparents as a child. He frequently became sick, due to being in close proximity to a factory. In school, he was also bullied because he didn't play any sports, didn't come from a rich family, was fat and had pale skin. So when Naik's father got an offer to work as a managing director in Bangkok, Thailand in 2005, it was a new start for Naik, and his first time outside India.

"Because of my experiences in school in Mumbai, I was terrified of moving to a new country. What if life will be the same?" Naik said.

A Star is Born

Not wanting a repeat of that, Naik tried to fix his situation.

"I played sports proactively and even joined the soccer team. I went from a nobody to a jock, Naik said. "When I first joined the team, someone from the girl's soccer team came up to me – it was literally like a scene from *Friday Night Lights* – she was like 'Now that you're part of the first string team, you need a first string girl.' I had no idea how to date girls so I mucked that up spectacularly."

Naik said he really grew in Bangkok, but his struggles soon returned in college. Naik had a long term relationship with an international student from Malaysia. The relationship lasted over two years, and they even moved in together, getting a puppy named Peaches. However, she broke up with him on New Year's Eve last year, which kicked off a tumultuous 2015 for Naik.

"For the first six or seven months, I was in full depression. I rarely went out, and from March to June in my final quarter of school, I didn't go to one day of class," Naik said. "I would eat one large pizza a day which is where the weight gain came from along with a complete lack of exercise."

"It was really important that I had Peaches at the time because dogs know when you're sad. If it wasn't for Peaches, I may have even committed suicide," Naik said.

Naik went for counseling, and was able to graduate by completing a term's worth of assignments for his four classes in one week.

"I almost messed up my chances of graduation. If my parents knew, I may not have seen the light of day and would probably be back in India, being the disgrace of my family," Naik said.

Naik's parents still don't know about what he went through, such as the depression and nearly not graduating.

"They don't know that I dated this girl, they don't know that we lived together, they don't know that I have a dog," Naik said. "My dad actually thought I was on drugs because I was spending so much money, when in reality, it was on her and Peaches. They would have been very upset if they knew.

They'd be like, 'you nearly threw your life away because of a girl and you lied to us?'" Naik said.

The Real World

After graduating from DePaul in the summer of 2015, Naik started looking for jobs, only to find another barrier in his way.

"It was really tough as an immigrant to get a job because they have all these hula hoops that you have to jump through. You have to have a campus job, then an unpaid and paid internship, and only if you can maintain that paid internship and keep your Social Security number can you get a job," Naik said.

This is partially why Naik pursued a master's degree in business development at DePaul. He reasoned that if there was a choice between an immigrant and an American who both went to the same school, why would a company choose him?

"I chose to enroll so that when I apply for a job afterwards, I can look at them and say, I know the creative, I know the business, so you can trust me to have both mindsets," he said.

However, Naik soon learned that his parents couldn't keep sending him money every week because they had to save up for his sister's college expenses, so he now had to work as well as study. He soon got an internship at Tom, Dick and Harry Creative. Naik had to work harder than he's ever done in the past, and he did just that, eventually getting a full-time job.

"What impressed me about Naik is his work ethic. I've spoken to him and I know his passion as a filmmaker," said Ken Wilson, creative director at Tom Dick and Harry Creative. "Usually that serves as a crutch to many young interns who just don't give their 100 percent due to other passions and goals, but Vedant, however, gives his all in whatever task he is assigned to."

Despite all the struggles he's had to endure throughout his life from his childhood to college, Naik says he's now a happy man. With the income from his current job, he is now able to fund his first passion project — *The Pearl Equation*.

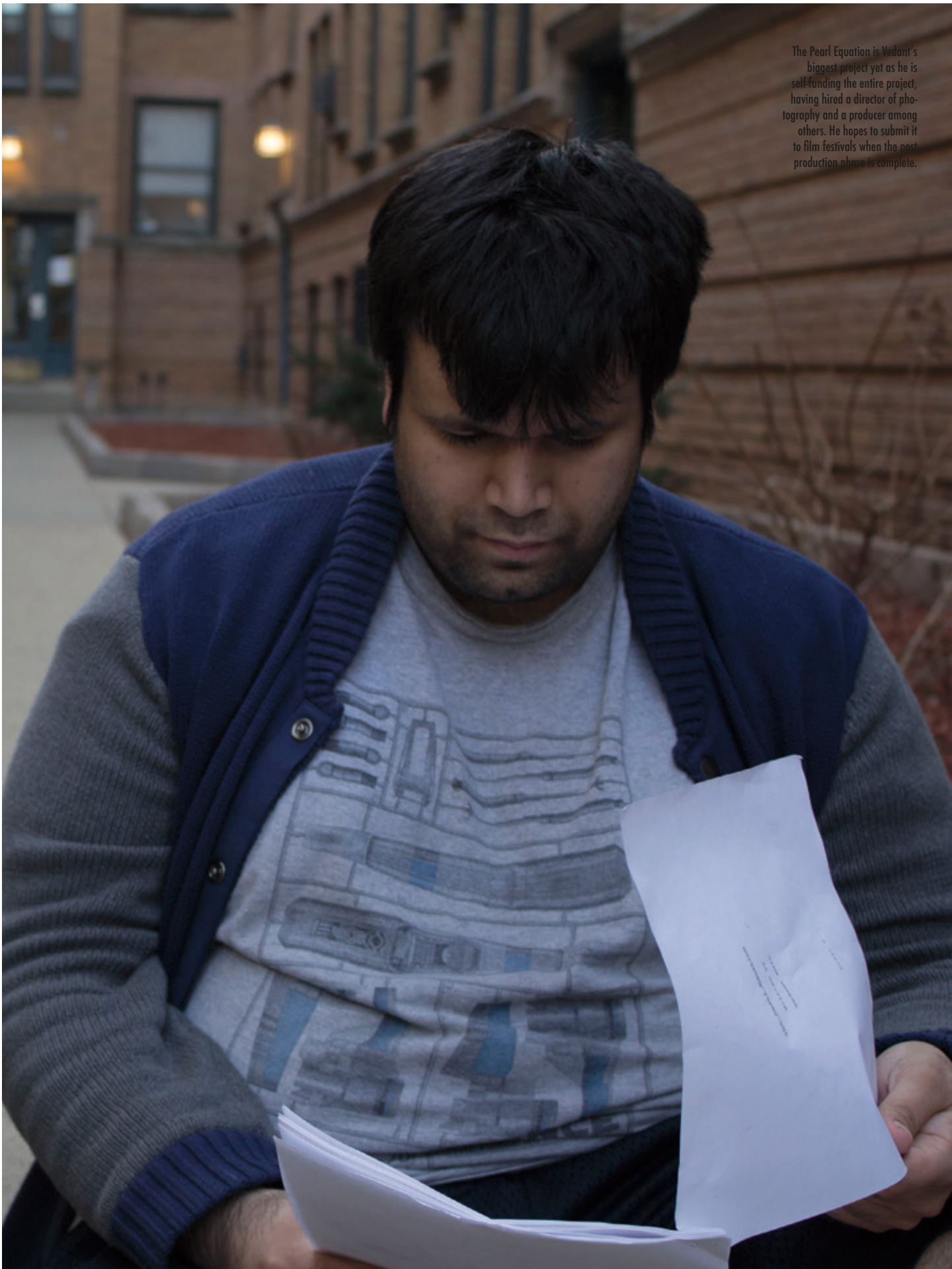
"I always used to work on crime thrillers so this is something completely new. I've already made a list of festivals that I'd submit it to. If something happens with it, I can actually move into the filmmaking business, which is the real dream."

Naik would only leave copywriting if he saw stability with a permanent filmmaking gig.

While he enjoys his current job, it'll always remain second to filmmaking as the only reason he has the job is to have a stable pay and lifestyle.

However, if his film doesn't get accepted, Naik said he won't be disheartened and will instead use it as a learning experience.

"I don't cry over the past now," Naik said. "I've also learned to stop looking ahead to the future, already envisioning your success, and instead, focus on living in the present."



The Pearl Equation is Vadani's biggest project yet as he is self-funding the entire project, having hired a director of photography and a producer among others. He hopes to submit it to film festivals when the post-production phase is complete.