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Research Paper

2:1 Introduction

"Flexman" is a character animated short with an emphasis on comic timing and exaggerated poses that showcases the humorous relationship between a retired superhero and his dog in a cartoon style.

2.2 Cultural, historical, scientific and social aspects - Narrative

"Historically, comics have been there for our major national crises. Superheroes reached their all-time peak of popularity during World War II. Superman, Batman, Captain America and many other heroes engaged in battle against the Axis powers." (Fingeroth). The superhero story is classic and works in many ways. I started coming up with a few story ideas for my thesis the summer before class and I decided to go with my narrative about a retired superhero that came out of retirement to help save the day. As John Lasseter says the most important part of the film is the story. When speaking of the Toy Story John says" What we wanted to do was a character film. No matter what kind of technology is used, no matter how a movie is made, the story is the most important thing. That's what makes entertainment; and that's what makes the people come to see a

movie." (Street, 80) Myself like the rest of society is fascinated with superheroes. Not only do they have amazing powers, that would be fun to possess, but they also are selfless and fearless, willing to risk their life for another's. The only difference in my superhero is that he in not invisible, he has aged and with his age comes some kinks in his superpowers. Could you imagine being all-powerful one day and the next day you're a civilian, that's sort of what happens to Nigel.

My influences for this idea basically stemmed from The Incredibles and Wallace and Gromit. I enjoy watching Wallace and Gromit and how the characters play off of one another, Gromit being the smarter one and a step ahead of Wallace, while Wallace tends to be oblivious about things around him. In my narrative I have Fang and Nigel playing off the speed of Fang and the slowness of Nigel. As for the retired superhero angle, two examples in which it works are The Incredibles and SpongeBob Square Pants - Mermaidman and Barnacleboy. The Incredibles works on a similar manner as my short in that sometimes trying to help can be "the idea is that even people trying to protect you can do you harm, as good as their intentions may be." (Fingeroth) The Incredibles has a bit of a modern twist, being that they were forced to retire and go into hiding due to the fact that the public was holding them legally liable. Where as Nigel is sent to retirement due to his age, but he is not ashamed at all of who he is. He is not forced to hide himself and wears his costume around proudly. As for Mermaidman and Barnacleboy, the angle they take is that their superheroes are in a retirement home and their powers no longer really work. Which is the angle I am going for. When researching for reference material, I came across an exhibit called L'Hospice . Once I saw these images I immediately thought,

that's exactly what I'm going for. It was a sculpture showing old famous superheroes on IV support, in wheelchairs, and with walkers.

The idea of superheroes retiring intrigued me. I began to think about other civil jobs such as firemen, policemen and soldiers. All of them never really ever seem to leave their jobs behind. Their training to serve becomes a part of who they are. Also much like our field, if you truly love what you do, you wouldn't want to let it go. I've evolved my story throughout my research changing the gags and setting but still remaining true to my originally concept, what would a retired superhero do if he was no longer called for duty. My guess would be that he would linger around waiting for that one day that they might still need him and be willing to serve at the drop of a hat.

2.3 Artistic aspects

The Design of the film will have an overall clean and simplistic look, since I want my main emphasis to be on the animation. The appearance of the short that I had in mind would be similar to the inside of the houses in the movie <u>Over the Hedge</u>. The kitchen has somewhat of a realistic feel, but is not too detailed. For instance the cabinets in the kitchen look like cabinets but are missing knobs and some of the bottles that are of less importance in the refrigerator are missing labels. I want a similar feel to my short to draw all of the audience's attention to the characters' detail and movement. I also like the stylized design of furniture in <u>Toy Story</u>. It's somewhat realistic, but a bit wonky. The Dresser has clunky legs but has an overall roundness and softness to the design that I find quite appealing.

As for the character design, I had many inspirations. I also wanted to keep the designs of the characters simple with a cartoon style since I knew that I would be exaggerating their expressions. Some of my inspirations for Nigel were <u>Mermaidman and Barnacleboy</u>, <u>Mr. Magoo</u>, Geri from <u>Geri's Game</u>, Verne from <u>Over the Hedge</u> and the characters in the sculpture <u>L'Hospice</u>. As for <u>Mr. Magoo</u> and Geri I wanted to pull the exaggerated feature from their character, such as their nose, ears and bushy eyebrows and bring them into Nigel. In the beginning of <u>Geri's Game</u>, he has a gentle disposition similar to the way I want Nigel to come across. Verne has a similar personality; he's very cautious of the way things are done. Nigel will be the same, he is not only slow because he is old, and he is also slow because he thinks about things before he does them. Bringing in Nigel's age is where I will reference <u>Mermaidman and Barnacleboy</u> and <u>L'Hospice</u> . <u>Mermaidman and Barnacleboy</u> are a perfect example of how Nigel is; he's a retired superhero that can no longer perform his duties the way he used to, however at first he is unaware of that. Once I came across <u>L'Hospice</u>, I realized that this was the look I was going for the whole time. Superheroes that look like they just stepped out of a nursing home, aged and withered. Then there is the costume design; since Nigel has the stretch ability of course his reference for costume design would be past superheroes with the stretch ability such as Elastic Girl, Reed Richards and Plastic Man. All three have a fitted costume that has the ability to show off the stretching of their limbs. For details on Nigel's costume, I'll stuck with the classic look similar to Mr. Incredible, Superman and Batman where they have trunks over the suit and boots.

My inspirations for Fang were some famous dogs, such as Snoopy, Gromit and Brian from the <u>Family Guy</u>. All three dogs are very simple in design; they have a large snout with a circle button nose and long ears. Also Snoopy and Gromit both portray a distinct personality though their body language. Fang will be a non-verbal character that's action will be described in his body language with the focus on his ears and eyes. Fang will be a very fast paced individual similar to Speedy Gonzales or Hammy from Over the Hedge. He will be hyperactive and fast in pace. Fang does everything in a rush the only difference between him and these characters is that when Fang rushes things; it's like a down ward spiral of disaster.

2.4 Technical aspects

Animation can be traced back all the way to the cave men where they used cave drawings to tell stories of their hunts. Peter Mark Roget with the creation of the "birth to various optical contraptions" in 1824 with the invention of the "persistence of vision" is considered the beginning of animation. In 1897 "Emile Cohl made and showed his first animated film at the Follies in Paris" (Williams, 16) Animation has come along way since that childlike "white lines on black". (Williams, 16) For the Technical aspect of animation, every animator needs to follow the principles of animation: "Squash and Stretch, Anticipation, Staging, Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose, Follow Through and Overlapping Action, Slow in and Slow out, Arcs, Secondary Action, Timing, Exaggeration and Appeal." (Thomas and Johnson 47)

"Timing is the essence of animation. It is what makes animation different to other visual arts where the observer controls how much time a piece of art is viewed." John Lasseter. (Whitaker and Halas, 7) I automatically knew I wanted to play the animation off of Chuck Jones comic timing. Chuck Jones directed almost every Looney Toons Short that I remember watching and every one of them makes me laugh every time. As Leonard Maltin said "Chuck has often said that the difference between a laugh and no laugh can be as little as one frame." (Chuck Jones Extremes and Inbetweens) I'm going to have to really nail down the timing in order to mimic a similar style to Chuck's. The shorts Chuck directed also had a lot of gags in them much like my piece will. As Matt Groening says "The amazing thing about Chuck Jones's cartoons are not merely the big gags, for me they are the little moments, the little hesitations, the little silence when the character is floating in the air just before he realizes there in nothing underneath and then drops." (Chuck Jones Extremes and Inbetweens) I absolutely agree with Matt. We all know that the Wild E. Coyote is going to fall of the cliff while he's suspended in air. Every aspect of it defies gravity but it makes the moment when he actually falls that much more enjoyable. I'm going to have to hold the poses of the character to get the similar effects. Another fact that makes the defy the laws of gravity believable is the character's personality. We as the audience knows what the coyote is after and can't obtain, knowing that makes the gags even more hilarious. John Lasseter states it best when he says" When you imagine a character, you not only have to address it's personality, it's design and it's 3-D articulations, but also manage to create the illusion that it's movements reflect it's thoughts, it's emotion. This gives the impression that

the character is reflecting. That's my definition of the animation process of a character."
(Pinteau, 260) When Eric Goldberg speaks about Chuck's timing he says" And the way
that he would make the timing crisp is that he that would go from one pose over here to
another pose over here with what animators call smear drawings, so that he would take
about three frames where he would establish one pose here, one pose there and then
smear all the way between both poses at once and then fold up into the final drawing."[1]
One of the main parts of Chuck Jones timing is his use of smearing the drawings, which
is a very stylized approach. My contribution to the animated short is that I going to
attempt to get this same style of timing not using smear being that it would be impossible
to do with a rig. I'm going to exaggerate the squash and stretch instead, hoping to get the
same results. The camera angles are also going to play a huge roll in making the gags of
my shorts work. I'm going to have to really make sure that the angles reflect the pace of
the scene. In some cases I'm going to use close ups to get a better expression of the
character's reactions. Chuck Jones used fast cuts to get the character expressions to read.
As Eric Goldberg says "…if you look at a Chuck Jones cartoon, it not broad, it's rather
subtle. The distinction is that if he wants a particular facial expression to read in a very
sharp way, the transitions themselves will be very fast. " (<u>Chuck Jones Extremes and
Inbetweens</u>)

2.5 Final conclusions and relevance to the project

    In conclusion, my goal for my thesis is to mimic Chuck Jones style of
animation while overcoming the challenge of doing it in 3D. The thesis project will be a

lot of work for one person, but the reward in the long run would be able to pull if off, just

as I have pictured in my mind. "As Leonard Maltin puts it best "A live action director

sets up a scene, shoots it and tries to get the right energy, the right rhythm into scene, into

performances and such and then in the editing room refines that…well the animation

director has to do all that before hand." (Chuck Jones Extremes and Inbetweens) And this

is only one aspect of this project.

2.6 Bibliography & appendices

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