GOLDFISK

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<u>The film in its infancy</u>

Remember all the time you spent in your own imagination as a child going on adventures like fighting pirates and Vikings like they did on TV or in movies? You may have even included your family pet in on the fun. He/she would follow you around everywhere as you imagined you and him were a two man wrecking crew striking fear into the eyes of your imaginary Viking Pirate foes. At the end of the day you switched off your imagination scratched your loyal companion on the head and went home. What if you couldn't completely switch off your imagination? What if the things you did while on your imaginary adventure had real world consequences? What if your best friend was a goldfish?

"Goldfisk" is a story about a young boy, Jorgi. Who, like many young people, goes on many wondrous imaginary adventures with his best friend Schnitzel, his pet goldfish. But this time it's different. Jorgi and Schnitzel run into a foe they can't quite defeat and the real world consequences are devastating.

This animated film was made using 3D animated Computer Graphics. The choice of using 3D animation over other mediums of animation such as hand drawn animation or stop motion animation was made because 3D made it simpler to collaborate with teams. Making 3D my preferred method of animation mediums. It makes the process just about making a good film and not learning a new method of animation.

I do believe, however, that a film like this can be created with any form of animation. Indeed animation is at its core merely a device to tell a story, no matter how implausible that story seems.

When it comes to personal influences I find myself motivated less by individuals and more by genres. I get a great deal of influence from reading and from the everyday mundane. Such as hearing strangers talk on the bus, or watching people in the park. I Use their words and actions and making up my own stories about them.

It is rare to find an animation that has been conceived and completed by just a single individual. However as I mentioned before, animation is purely a form of telling a narrative. Although it is hard to find an animator who has completed a short animation alone, there are several individuals who influenced the animation field in their lifetime such as Glen Keane, Ollie Johnston, Tex Avery and Ralph Bakshi. Of those individuals, Tex Avery has been a major influence for me.

Tex Avery was the catalyst at Warner Brothers Studios to drive more ecstatic and off the wall animation into their cartoons. He encouraged his animators to go beyond the medium and really push the personality of the characters to their limit and even go so far as to break the fourth wall if need be. The fourth wall is an expression describing an imaginary wall between actors and the audience. Normally actors pretend that the audience is not there and instead is a fourth wall to their stage set. When an actor breaks the fourth wall he or she actively engages with audience. Tex has been quoted as saying "in a cartoon you can do anything" (Adamson). It's a quote that really resonates with me. You can do things in animation that are physically impossible in a live action film.

The very idea that I can have the power to show people something they've never seen before or tell them a story in a way that they've not experienced before is intoxicating. Using animation I can create something from nothing. I can only imagine what it was like for the

audiences to see Windsor Mccay's "Gerdie the Dinosaur" for the first time. To see a drawing come to life and move before their eyes must have been mesmerizing to witness. "Gerdie the Dinosaur" was a performance piece from Windsor Mccay in the Vaudeville era where Windsor interacted with and commanded a hand animated dinosaur.

Another individual independent animator that is a large influence to me is Don Hertzfeldt. Don is an independent animator and he created films such as the 2001 Academy award nominated for Best Animated Short Film "Rejected" as well as other short films like "Billy's Balloon", and "It's Such a Beautiful Day". What draws me to Don is his unrefined style in his films. Don hand draws, on paper, all of his films but his characters are little more than stick figures. Even though his characters are crude his storytelling pulls you in and his animation keeps you watching. When I watch a Hertzfeldt film I soon forget about the stick figures and concentrate on the message that is being told in the film.

I believe it takes real talent and skill to be able to spin a tale so well with characters that can brashly be described as elementary.

Aside from looking to past and present animators reading is also a major influence for me. I enjoy reading novels from authors such as Chuck Palahniuk, Carlton Mellick III, and Aldous Huxley. Huxley and Palahniuk spin tales of dystopia. Where Huxley writes about a dystopia through a utopia where everyone is over-drugged and too busy enjoying themselves that they ignore what is happening in the world around them. Palahniuk writes tales of people generally on the outside of main stream society becoming the unusual hero, people with addiction or deformity or people who are just plain acting the hero part for the publicity and attention. His writing takes people not normally considered even human and forces the viewer to identify with them.

Mellick III on the other hand belongs to a new genre of fiction writing called Bizzaro. Bizzaro turns absurdity into an art form and makes it OK to write about haunted body parts, or an obsession over a pre-chewed piece of gum. Bizzaro fiction in my mind is the literary equivalent of a Tex Avery cartoon. It's brash, outlandish, often crude and always entertaining.

Reflecting on my work I tend to love to associate with a dystopian fantasy. If not overly apparent I like to add a small touch of the unexpected or outrageous, even if it is a small piece. In my current film with the death of the best friend during one of the happiest times of a kids life, to the unexpected death of a lonely mosquito stopping for a bite to eat on his way to the office Christmas party.   I also have an unrefined pension for slightly sugar coating stories with a thin gloss of family friendly covering a darker undertone. I would like to further develop this aspect in future endeavors.

The decision to create this film as a CG animation was simply so that I would not have to worry so much about the technical side of creating a film and focus my attention on developing a great film. It was also based on a want, on my part, to further my knowledge and skills in the 3D/CG environment. Skills that I will need in future endeavors such as industry employment or teaching animation to young minds.

The process of creating an animation is not much different, conceptually, than creating a traditional piece of artwork, whether it is a sculpture, painting, or animation it still loosely follows a general creative process. If you were to create a sculpture, you would first develop the concept, the main idea or action. Then you would move on to sketch out your idea onto paper to really flesh out visually what you want your sculpture to look like or represent. After that you would move into a small mockup of your sculpture, a scaled version of your final piece that uses cheaper or easier to handle materials. You would choose your materials as well whether you want to use clay, stone, or metal whichever you chose will have an effect on the final piece. Once a material is chosen and your mockup is made and you approve of the final look then you begin creating the sculpture. All that preparation work should, in theory, make the final sculpture easier because you have a clear and concise idea before you even pick up a tool.

Animation follows a very similar track. You start an animation with an idea. My idea was based around the thought of a little boy using his imagination to transport him and his best friend to a land of Vikings and adventure. The idea evolved into the best friend being a goldfish in real life and a giant Viking in his imagination. They start off exploring a castle for treasures and end up getting into a battle with an undead king. Schnitzel, the goldfish Viking, gets knocked off the balcony during the fight. Jorgi is snapped back into reality and realizes that he himself accidentally knocked the fishbowl off the bunk bed and killed his best friend. It continues with Jorgi creating a Viking funeral at sea for Schnitzel which turns out to be a little boy burning a dead fish in his toilet.

Once the idea is resolved, sketching is visually necessary to effectively express other people your idea for feedback and collaboration. In animation this process is called a storyboard.

A storyboard is a series of drawings that plan out the animation. They allow you to see sequentially each scene and how a viewer would see the story. A good way to think of a storyboard would be to visualize a comic book panel. Each panel of a comic book is well thought out in its composition and what action is being displayed at that particular point in time. In a comic we don't see all the action but through each panel we are led through the story. Storyboarding unfolds the idea before you begin making the final product.

With a storyboard in hand an animatic is made. An animatic is to animation what the mockup was to creating the sculpture. It is an animation that uses rough drawings and limited animation to visually tell the story. Storyboarding is just a few drawings that tell the story, but an animatic moves telling you the whole story and allows the filmmaker to judge the length of each scene. A scene may take to long to get to the point or may move too fast missing an important part of the story. An animatic also helps determine where cameras record scenes or from what angle action is seen. Upon completion the length of the animatic also determines the length of the film.

In the sculpture comparison the next step is to choose a material. Granted the sculptor would probably be thinking about a favorite material during the idea phase, but at this point a material would need to be chosen. The same goes for animated filmmaking. The idea is all wrapped up in a tidy animatic that serves as a blueprint for the entire animation so an animation medium needs to be chosen. There are several types; with the most popular being 2D animation, 3D animation, and Stop-motion animation. 2D is possibly the oldest known type, also considered traditional animation, done with a pencil and paper with each frame being completely drawn by hand. This type has been updated by using computer software for drawing and painting. 3D animation is the newest form of animation, which consists of an artist manipulating

the 3D software to create props and puppets to be manipulated on screen. This process can mimic the other types, can mimic reality, and can certainly be used to create a visual style that is completely original. Another popular type of animation is stop-motion animation, which uses physical puppets and crafted props for each scene. The filmmaker poses the character or prop and takes a picture. Then, slightly moving the character into another pose, the filmmaker takes another picture. This process continues until that particular scene is complete. The pictures taken are then assembled in sequence and played back to reveal the animation. Each process has it's own set of benefits and drawbacks. It's up to the filmmaker to decide which type is preferred to tell the story.

As stated previously I chose 3D animation because the scale of the world I can build within a computer is nearly infinite. I knew I wanted a combination of large wondrous worlds that seem to expand as far as the eye can see, along with small tight rooms that feel confined and boring.

I began creating models of a bedroom along with everything that would need to be in a child's room. I made a bunk bed that had a mattress on top and a desk/workstation on the bottom. I created a dresser that doubled as a staircase leading to the top bunk, various toys were created along with a toy box. Pretty much everything you would see in a child's bedroom had to be created. I did the same with a bathroom. I then modeled a Viking world beach scene with cold sands and a boat drug onto the beach still wet from the trip through the ocean. Ominous mountains double as a castle complete with a throne room for a now dead, king.

The character models were created with assistance, my modeling skills are good enough for props and scenery but I wanted someone that has a better grasp of anatomy and geometric structure to model the characters. After the characters were modeled, I asked another friend to

help rig the characters. Rigging a character is simply the process of creating a bone and control system that allows an animator to move the model in the computer. Rigging is a highly technical aspect of 3D animation and if not done correctly can drastically reduce the amount of control an animator needs for the performance the respective character deserves.

After the characters were rigged I began to UV map my models. U and V are used as coordinates for laying out a 2D texture onto a 3D surface. The specific letters U and V were chosen because the traditional letters X and Y were already used in 3D object space. To understand what it is to UV map a model, one should think of a cube shaped cardboard box. If a label were added to the cube shape the label might get wrinkled or become crooked simply because it's difficult to set correctly on a cube form. An easier way to add that label is to break the box down so that it lies flat. Once the box is flat the label can be applied to line up with the edges so it is straight with no wrinkles or tears. UV mapping is like breaking down the cardboard box but doing it to more complicated structures such as human models, the concept is still the same. Once all the models were UV mapped another friend gave the characters color and texture by painting over the flattened maps that the UV map created.

While the textures were being applied I began animating the individual shots, broken down by scene. Each scene has several shots within it. For example, the beach scene has four shots and each shot lasts until I want to communicate a new idea. So the first shot of the beach scene is Jorgi carrying a now dead Schnitzel to the boat, and then pushing the boat out to sea. The second scene is Jorgi walking up the beach to grab his bow and arrow. I separated the shots because I did not need to show the audience Jorgi turning around toward his bow and to start walking. That would have made either shot too long and may have only bored the audience. There are four scenes in the film: a throne room scene, a bedroom scene, a beach scene, and a

bathroom scene.

As I animate each shot I am careful to remember the basis of movement within animation. Animation is almost always based on real life circumstances and happenings. An animator's goal is to study natural movement and embellish that motion for the screen. So I'm careful to think about the shot on hand and compile reference material for the movement and emotion that I need to convey. For the most part my reference material is of myself acting out shots. Sometimes if I can't adequately reproduce a shot I use online references such as youtube and vimeo for motion that is similar to what I want to show.

Once I have my reference material it's time to start animating. An important note to remember is that even though a computer can fill in gaps between keys when animating it's never a good idea to let the computer do that. The computer is a machine and it will try to get from point A to point B as quickly and easily as possible. An animator's job is to embellish and exaggerate life. The path of least resistance does neither. Once an animator has finished she or he will have touched nearly every frame of the scene to make sure that each pose is telling the story that needs to be told.

Throughout the animation process animators periodically make short videos of the shot they have been working on. These videos allow the animator to see the work they have been doing in real time. They will be able to judge the timing of each movement and whether or not the action is visually working to push the story. Receiving constructive criticism from fellow animators is another reason to make a quick video of in-progress animation.

After animation is complete lighting and rendering begins. Each shot needs to have a light set-up. Lighting will emphasize a mood or the feeling you want to portray. Rendering is the process of taking all the information from the models, the texturing, the animation, the

lighting and making a final image out of it. Rendering in itself is another highly technical aspect

of 3D animation. It takes all the information and feeds it into rendering software, with additional

parameters set to increase the quality or make the images render faster. Rendering develops the

final image, one per frame.

The images are compiled and shown sequentially to watch the film. Additionally those

images can be improved in another software package to add additional effects to the film, such as

sparks when two blades hit together. Another benefit of this step is color correcting which is

simply making sure all the images are similar in hue, saturation and value.

Adding titles and credits complete the animated film.

<u>Thoughts; after the fact.</u>

Is my film a successful film? I've asked myself this and considered the answer countless times during the process of making the film. I've lost sleep over this question and rarely have come to a conclusive answer. I have come to the realization that it really depends on what my definition of successful is.

If I define a successful film as an award winning film dominating its way through the festival circuit culminating in an Oscar win. Then, no, I don't think this film will be that successful. I enjoyed making this film and I put countless hours of hard work into getting it done. I do think it is a great film, but I don't think it's a truly amazing film.

Alternatively, when I define successful as coming away from this experience more capable in my craft than before, then yes I do think this film was successful. With that definition I think this film was an extremely successful film. While making this film I believe I have learned a lot about every step of making a 3D animated short film. Before coming into this program I had intimate knowledge of one, maybe two steps of the process of a fully realized short. My passion has always been in the actual animation piece of the process. The other sections such as modeling and lighting were skill sets that I knew how to do, but have not mastered to any degree.

Since I have now completed a short animated film I believe that my knowledge of each part of creating a short animated film has greatly improved. I still prefer actual animating when considering the technical processes involved, but I am now competent in those processes as well. I feel well equipped to continue making films.

Resources

Adamson, Joe, *Tex Avery: King of Cartoons*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1975