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How to Train Your Dog

By

Zihao Bai

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master
of fine art in film and animation

School of film and animation

College of imaging arts and sciences

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May 5, 2018

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ABSTRACT

How to Train Your Dog is a 2D short animated film with a total timescale of four minutes and five seconds including credits. It is a story about what would happen if someone treats a cat as though it was a dog. The main character of the story is an alien who does not live on the earth and has never seen a dog or a cat before. He gets obsessed with this cute little animal at his first time seeing it on a TV commercial selling this kind of pet newly imported from the earth. He orders the dog immediately, but a cat is delivered to him by mistake. He tries to play with the cat as if it was a dog, which undoubtedly fails and causes a series of conflicts. At last, he finds out his own alien way of getting along with the cat.

How to Train Your Dog is a hand-drawn animation which was primarily created using the computer software TVPaint Animation. I did the concept design work in Adobe Photoshop, and the editing work was achieved in Adobe Premiere.

The paper will discuss the entire process and details of the production, including the inspiration and motivation of making the film. It also covers the problems and challenges I came across during the process and how I got over them to finish the final film.

INTRODUCTION

The making of my graduate thesis film *How to Train Your Dog* began in September 2016 with the course Thesis Preparation Seminar and finished with the final screening on campus at RIT in May 2017. I engaged lots of problems and kept fixing them under the constant supervision of my thesis committee members; Charles Bandla, Cat Ashworth and Peter Kiwitt. My workflow for this film is based on a traditional animation short film production pipeline, which is usually made up of three main procedures: pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production usually consists of story development, concept design, character/environment design, storyboard, and animatic. Production includes the environment drawing, rough animation, inking, and coloring. Post-production is music composing, sound effects, compositing, and final editing.

When considering the topic for my thesis film, I determined to do an animal related animation at the beginning of my thesis preparation. I enjoy both animation and live action very much because, for me, they are two different ways of storytelling, each with their own unique benefits. In my mind, one of the benefits of the animation is that it can tell a story about animals. Because it is quite arduous and expensive to direct an animal or to make a vivid CG animal in live action. What's more, I had never done animal animation in RIT before. So making my thesis film an animal film was a meaningful challenge for me.

In the animal world, dogs and cats are two top popular choices as pets. However, people usually play a different role in the relationship with a cat and the relationship with a dog. Most pet owners are in the dominant position in their relationship with the dog because the dog always follows the order from their owner. They can do fetches,

shake hands, turn in circles, and guard the house for their owners. The situation reverses when a person faces a cat. Cats usually occupy the dominant position, and sometimes cats even seem like they are superior owner of their human. One common 'in joke' among cat lovers is "Dogs have owners, cats have staff". Thus the idea of treating a cat as if it was a dog came to me when I determined to make an animal related thesis film. That was exactly the basic idea behind How to Train Your Dog.

Even though I spent almost two months on the developing of the original story in the course Thesis Preparation Seminar, the story still changed a lot during the following production. The structure and the theme of the final story were entirely different from the original treatments. The only thing that remained unchanged was the original idea of the story.

THE PROCESS

PRE-PRODUCTION

-Story Development

Developing the story from a simple idea is very hard. The original idea of the story that a character treats a cat as if it was a dog was only an action of the character. The first challenge for me was to find an objective for this character to make the action more reasonable so that the character could be more believable. A character with a clear goal is the most basic thing that makes a story entertaining and solid. The most attracting objective should be something primal to the character like to survive from hunger or to get some drink in the desert, which helps audiences get empathy for the character and get involved in the story more easily. The objective I originally chose for the character was LOVE.

In my first version of the story, which I came up during the Thesis Preparation Seminar class, the main character is a 22-year-old boy whose girlfriend just lost her beloved dog. To cheer her up, the boy sets off the adventure of looking for the lost dog. After getting through several obstacles, he does not get the dog back but finds a cat that looks like the missing dog instead. Then he disguises that cat and trains the cat how to behave like the dog. He fails, and the camouflage gets exposed. But the girl understands his effort on cheering her up and forgives the boy.

The theme and objective of the story were pretty clear, but it didn't work. First of all the idea that a cat looks like a dog is inconvincible. Secondly, disguising the cat as a dog is a bad idea for the boy in the story. He has many other options he can choose to cheer his girlfriend up instead of this one which completely goes against the common

sense. Although the story happens in the animation world in which the audience would tolerate something against the reality, the logic behind the character's action should always be believable. In this case, the boy's objective doesn't support his action very much. The story was also too complicated. It needed to introduce four different characters to the audience and show the changes of the relationship between each of them, which I thought was impossible to finish in the limited time. So I started cutting down the story.

In my second version of the story, I made the main character a 16-year-old boy who is raising a cat in his apartment. But he is envious of the fact that his neighbor has a smart pet dog who can do fetches, can shake hands, and follows every order his host gives, while the boy's cat never listens to him and always makes troubles. So he wants to train his cat as a dog to make him become well-mannered. Although he fails in the end, he also discovers the fact that his cat has its unique advantages. The cat also cares about and loves him in a different way in which the dog usually does.

This version of the story focused more on the training part compared with the previous one. But the problem was that it would take too much time to clearly set up the character's envy at the beginning and show it to the audience. What's more, when I pitched this draft to my committee members and my friends, some of them didn't get the idea that the boy wants to train his cat because of envy. In other words, the connection between the objective and the action was not strong enough. The main character's want didn't support his action very well.

In order to solve this problem, I determined to make the character 'silly' enough that he cannot tell the difference between a cat and a dog. If the character has never met these two species before and is not as familiar with them as human beings are, he would believe in the fact that what he faces is indeed a real dog. Since in animation, the

audience wouldn't doubt the reality of the story if the character is something non-human, I determined to take advantage of this. In my final version, the character became an alien who lives on another planet and has never seen a dog or a cat before. One day when he sees a cute dog in the commercial, he gets obsessed with it immediately because the pet he has on his planet looks ugly and is not as intelligent as the dog. He decides to buy a dog instantly. But the shopping system isn't that reliable, and a cat is delivered to him by mistake. Because he has no knowledge about the dog except for what he sees on the commercial, he believes in what he receives is a dog. In this way, the logic behind his action worked quite well, and his objective (having a dog as a pet and making friends with him) also got firmly connected with his action.

After I had a solid character whose background is reasonable enough to support his action towards his objective, all I needed to do was to find some obstacles and conflicts for the character. In the film, the most dramatic change from the beginning to the end was their relationship. They first meet as strangers, and they end up as friends in a good relationship. So the conflict should be between the two characters. In another word, their relationship should not go straightforwardly from strangers to friends but should go to some low point such as becoming rivals or enemies before they become friends. When you treat a cat in a doggy way, it would certainly anger him and cause the conflict between the two characters.

Before I was about to start my production period, Charles Bandla reminded me that the cat in my story was more like a prop instead of a character, who only passively reacts to what the alien character does but doesn't actively lead the story to the new direction. Charles suggested to add an objective to the cat to make him more vivid. According to the primal objective rule, I made the cat suffer from hunger and want to get food from the alien. This changed a lot to my story. It led the conflict between the

two characters to a new level.

-Character/background design

I had three version of the story, except for the first one, I did the character design for the final two. Since I was not very good at character design and the story didn't get confirmed during the early process, I didn't go deeply into the character design. I kept focusing on the shape of the character to tell the story.

For example, for my second version of the story, I needed to do the design work for both cat and dog. I made the dog look much more rectangular to indicate that he is loyal and even a little bit dumb while I made the cat look much more triangular to make him looks more intelligent. I extended the pets' traits to their host. For the dog's host, I made him looks more muscular and dumb when comparing with the cat's host who seems more mischievous.



Figure 1 character design for 2nd story version

As my story developed my character design didn't change too much. I just kept pushing the form. In my third story version, the cat looks smarter and even a little bit sly compared with the previous one, while this time I had the alien character a little bit

geek looking to make it more reasonable for him to treat the cat in a doggy way.

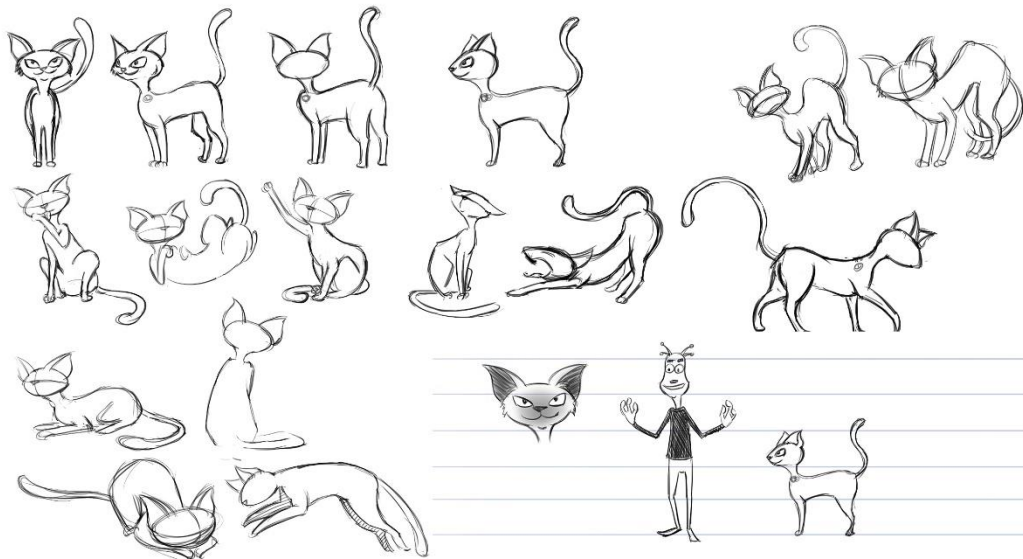


Figure 2 character design for 3rd story version

My story was set in the interior environment of the alien's house, which made it a lot easier for me to do the background design. What I needed to do was to figure out what kind of props were required in the scene and then put them in the interior space.

-Storyboard and animatic

Storyboard is a sequence of images displayed with the purpose of pre-visualizing. It's a blueprint for the animator to follow, a map to figure out camera and lighting placement.

During my whole filmmaking process, the storyboard was the most time-consuming part, but I thought it was pretty worthwhile. Because my film didn't have any dialogue, storyboard, instead of the script, was the best choice for me to explore and develop the story flow. The three versions of the story I mentioned in the Story Development part were only big ideas I had during the production process, for each of them, I explored and experimented several different drafts with the help of storyboard.

During each week of the first thesis semester, I came out with some board sequence,

brought them to Charles Bandla and pitched my story to him. Then he would give me some thoughts and opinions based on the sequence I showed him and my original idea about the sequence. Then I would go back and revise the sequence according to the suggestions I received. In the next week, I showed up with my revisions or some new sequences of the story then we went through the same process again. Slowly but surely, my story gradually got shaped during these repeat process.

The storyboard also helped me explore the problems in my story. Sometimes I thought the story worked when it was in my mind or in the treatment. As I boarded it out, it didn't work very well. Some story plots were very engaging and funny when I discussed it with my friends, but they were found uninteresting as soon as they were executed on paper.

One good thing about storyboard is that it's viewable, I can clearly communicate my story to others with a little explanations with words. When I required some opinions from other people, I didn't verbally explain my story to them anymore, all I needed to do was show them my storyboard with me pitching it. It was very convenient for me to know which part of the sequence didn't work for them. They can directly point out the problems about my camera angle, my character acting, and the rhythm of the story.

Besides, there is also one more advantage about storyboard. For example, when an old version of the story didn't work, it didn't mean all the story plots in that version should be discarded. I took advantages of those old boards, did some changes with the character and background and put them in the new story to see if they fit in. This helped me save lots of time in experimenting with the possible story direction and without those trial and error tests, I would not finish my final story.

I didn't plan to make an animatic for my film at first since I had already spent too much time in my storyboard process. I was feeling nervous because I fell far behind

other graduate students' thesis progress. However, my committee chair Charles Bandla encouraged me to do the animatic because it was the last stop where I can self-check my whole story before it was too late and it was also a chance to see if the story looks right in real time, which I cannot tell through a storyboard. It can also help me figure out how long my final animation will probably be. If the length was over my expectation, which means I couldn't finish it on time, I can decide which part I should cut down before I went into the production process. Fortunately, the overall animatic was three minutes and 58 seconds, which is quite reasonable for me to finish before the screening.

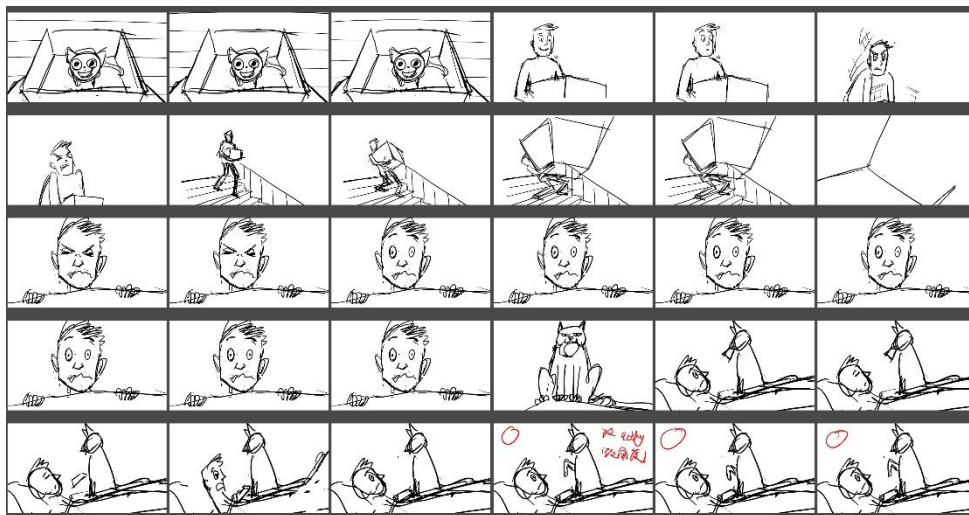


Figure 3 one draft of storyboard from 2nd story version

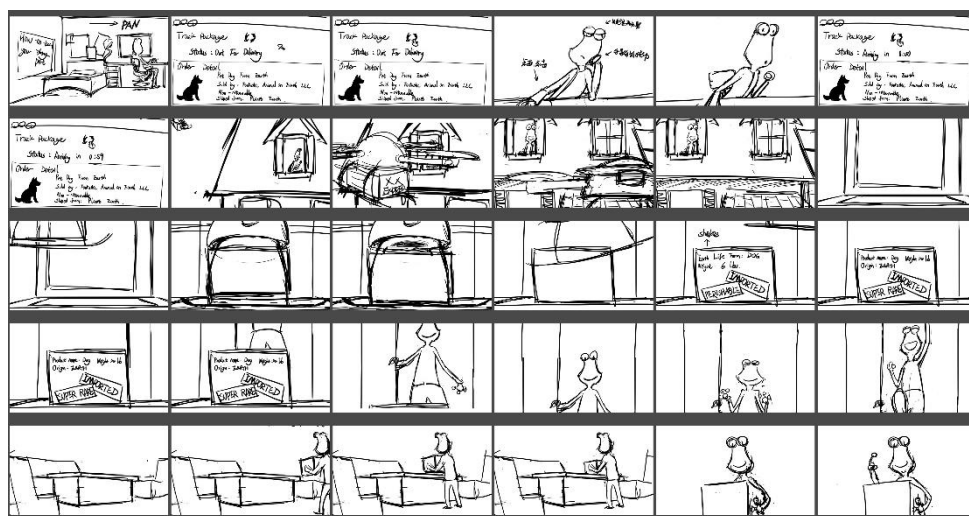


Figure 4 one draft of storyboard from 3rd story version

-Shot list and timeline

With all pre-production work prepared, one last thing before getting into production was to create a production plan. Counting out how many background drawings, key poses, breakdowns, and in-betweens needed to be accomplished were quite important to work efficiently. A shot list with timeline helped me effectively manage my time on production. I can tell whether I was falling behind the schedule, in which case I would focus more on speed instead of quality, or I went ahead of the schedule, in which case I could go back and refine the previous work I was not satisfied with.

Shot	Description	Character(s)	Location	Camera	Length	Notes
1	Scene opens with a close-up of Jay Gatsby's face as he looks out over his estate.	Jay Gatsby	Long Island Sound	Close-up	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
2	Wide shot of the mansion at night with the lights reflecting on the water.	Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway	Long Island Sound	Wide shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
3	Medium shot of Nick Carraway talking to Jay Gatsby on the porch.	Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby	Long Island Sound	Medium shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
4	Close-up of Nick Carraway's face as he looks at Jay Gatsby.	Nick Carraway	Long Island Sound	Close-up	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
5	Medium shot of Jay Gatsby looking out over the water.	Jay Gatsby	Long Island Sound	Medium shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
6	Wide shot of the mansion at night with the lights reflecting on the water.	Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway	Long Island Sound	Wide shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
7	Medium shot of Nick Carraway talking to Jay Gatsby on the porch.	Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby	Long Island Sound	Medium shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
8	Close-up of Nick Carraway's face as he looks at Jay Gatsby.	Nick Carraway	Long Island Sound	Close-up	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
9	Medium shot of Jay Gatsby looking out over the water.	Jay Gatsby	Long Island Sound	Medium shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene
10	Wide shot of the mansion at night with the lights reflecting on the water.	Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway	Long Island Sound	Wide shot	0:30	Blue tint, change scene

Figure 5 shot list

Day	Task	Start Time	End Time	Status
1	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
2	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
3	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
4	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
5	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
6	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
7	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
8	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
9	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
10	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
11	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
12	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
13	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
14	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
15	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
16	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
17	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
18	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
19	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
20	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
21	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
22	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
23	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
24	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
25	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
26	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
27	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
28	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
29	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
30	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed
31	Storyboarding	9:00	12:00	Completed

Figure 6 time sheet

PRODUCTION

-Rough animation

When some of my classmates started their animation process in the first thesis semester, I was still struggling with the storyboard to finalize my story. This made me really nervous and frustrated because I was afraid that I couldn't finish my animation on time. Professor Charles didn't push me to start animating rashly. He gave me enough time to work on my story and told me that the time I spent on the story was never wasted, the time would pay back when I started doing my animation. He was right. All my types of shot, camera angles, and camera movements were gradually determined in my storyboard, so I felt quite confident when doing the rough animation. I didn't need to worry about what if I finished one shot but then decided to cut it off from my story. In other words, I didn't have the risk of doing unnecessary work in this process. Every shot I finished in rough animation finally got refined and appeared in my final animation. None of them was cut away.

Although I had finished two animated films in RIT before my thesis film, animation for *How to Train Your Dog* was also a big challenge for me because it involved animal animation. The characters in the previous two films I had finished were all humans. When I had problems with the action of the character in those two films, I recorded myself with the cell phone acting out the sequence as the reference. I can learn the body mechanics and movements from the reference. But this time I was animating a cat with four legs. First, I didn't have a cat in my apartment. Even assuming the fact that I had a cat, I couldn't make him act out what the character exactly was doing in the film. So I had to go through Youtube, watch all kinds of cat videos, and learn from them. There are two types of animal animation generally. One is more anthropomorphic such

as Tom and Jerry, and the other is more realistic such as 101 Dalmatians. In my film, the cat acts more realistically, so the reference videos from website helped me a lot.

My rough animation process followed the classic animation process introduced in “The Animator's Survival Kit” by Richard Williams. Firstly I finished the key poses by refining my drawings in the storyboard. Some of the key poses were directly from my storyboard without any changes. Then I went into extreme poses which referred to the change of a direction in the action of the character. My last step was breakdown poses which indicated how character moved from one extreme to another. I didn't do my in-betweens in this process. I only timed my animation with the breakdowns and left the in-betweens to my inking process.

The most significant challenge I met during the production was that there was a small action sequence at the end of the film. Two characters are contending for a cat snack in the sequence and there is one moment that the cat is very close to it but finally, the alien character stems the tide. I planned to do the sequence in slow motion. But it was so hard to do and thinking of it may take much effort to finish, I left it aside and kept working on other shots first. After all other sequences got finished, I began working on this scene. Two weeks before my deadline it remained unfinished. The animation didn't look like slow motion at all. As the deadline approached, I compromised and decided to change my original plan. Usually, in a running match video, when the first athlete approaches the finish line, the high-speed camera takes pictures of him bypassing his last rival, his chest hitting the line, and him crossing the line. Then those pictures are edited together to indicate the importance of those moments. I decided to make the sequence looks like that. I drew out the moments when the cat's paw reaches the snack, the alien switches the snack to the other hand, and the cat misses the snack. Then put these drawings together and made each of them last

about one second to mimic such kind of effect. In order to make this part more distinguished than other shots, I changed the art style of this scene. I made it look like the traditional 80s' Japanese manga with the exaggerated shading and lots of speed lines in the background to indicate the tenseness of the moment.

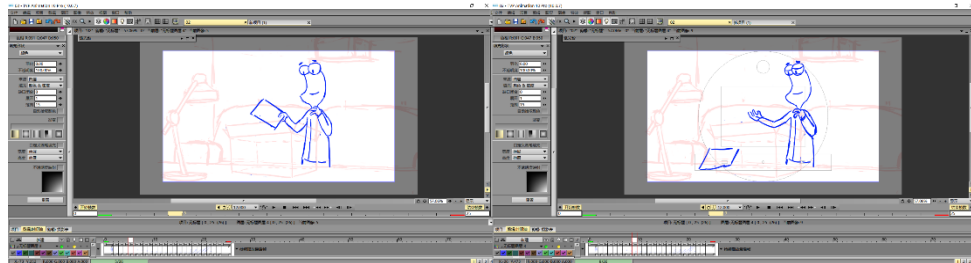


Figure 7 rough animation process

-Inking and Coloring

I alternated my rough animation and my inking/coloring process together because inking and coloring was simply a long and tedious process, it only required repeated labor work instead of mind work as rough animation needed. So doing inking and coloring is a kind of rest for me in the rough animation process.

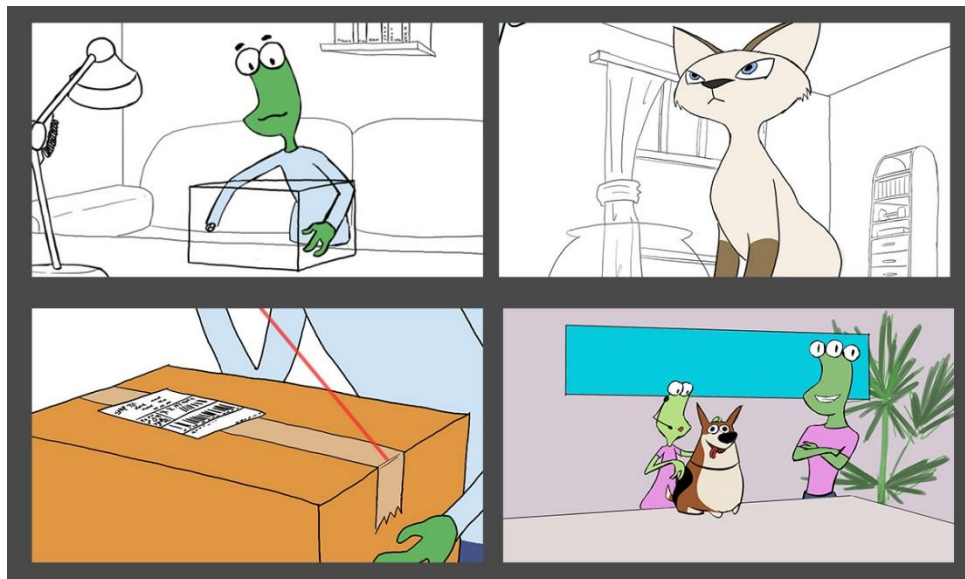


Figure 8 coloring process

I finished my coloring process in Tvpaint Animation because the software is very friendly to coloring. I used the Gap Closer function which can automatically close the

line for me so that I can avoid filling the color to unwanted areas. In addition, its Auto Pick Color Option helped accelerate my coloring speed a lot. It can pick a color when I clicked and can place the color on the new area when I released the button. Combined with a Light table which only displays the previous frame, I picked the color from the last frame and placed it in my current frame, with a simple click for colors which were in the zone, or with a drag and drop click for the others. These two functions save me a great deal of time.

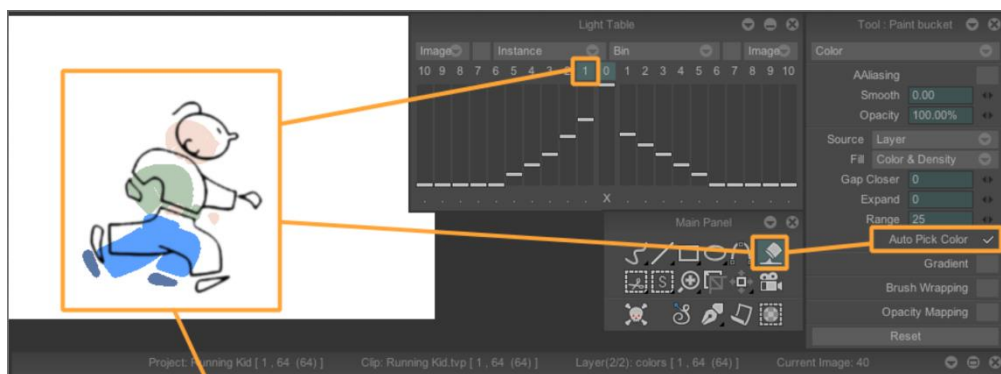


Figure 9 auto pick color and brush wrapping in Tvpaint

POST-PRODUCTION

-Compositing

My composition process had two steps. In the first step, I composited in Tvpaint Animation. I imported my background drawings which I finished in Adobe Photoshop and put them together with the animation I finished in Tvpaint. The reason I didn't use Adobe After Effect was that I didn't want to export my animation as separate images and import them again to other software, which may cause troubles like missing frames or format problems. Tvpaint Animation performed pretty well on this kind of basic compositing work. Each of my shot was in separate Tvpaint files and in each file my layers were well-organized, so it was convenient for me to adjust the timing of my animation within each shot. Besides, Tvpaint also offers a wide range of effects, which has been specifically designed for working on the animated footage. I used the blur effect to separate my foreground and background to create the depth of the field and some focus rack effects.

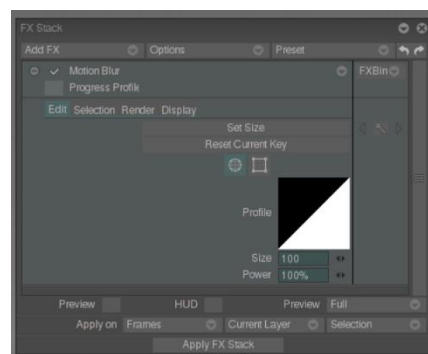


Figure 10 blur effect in Tvpaint

After I put the background to every shot and was satisfied with the timing within the shot, I exported them to different video files shot by shot and put them together in Adobe Premiere. I did this because I need to prepare for the next step of adding the sound effects and music to the film. Tvpaint is not very friendly with the sound. Since

every shot of my film was in the separate file, when I needed to make some adjustment on the timing of the shot, I went back to the specific Tvpaint shot file and did the changes. Then I exported the shot as the same video file and update that source file in Premiere.

-Dialogue, Sound Effects and Music

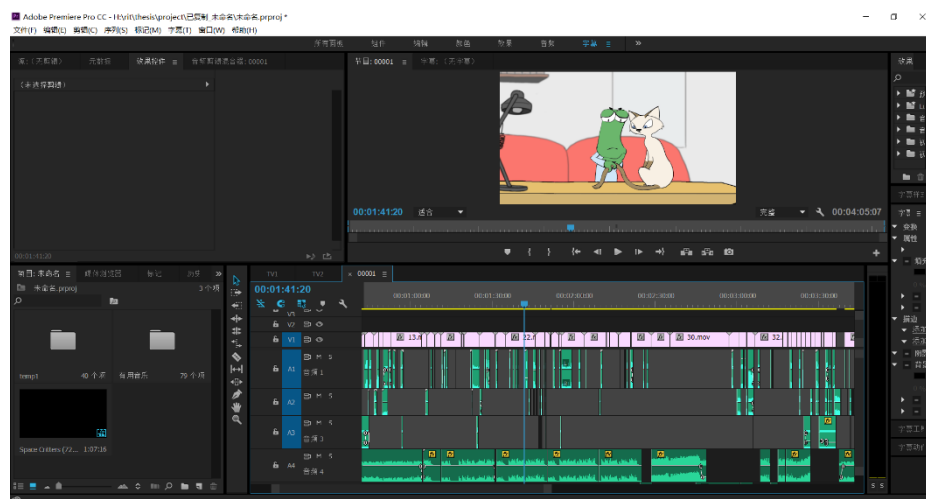
All the sound effects and dialogues in my film were recorded by myself with the 702 kit borrowed from SOFA Cage.

I had some short dialogues for the characters in the film, although the contents of the dialogues were not important, which means the action of talking was more important than what they were talking about. Some animators believe that is you watch an animation with the sound off, and understand the story, the animator did a great job, because the story is clear through the images. That's what I was trying to achieve in my thesis film. What's more, my main character was an alien, so it was more reasonable that the audience didn't understand his language. I made my character talk but not in English, just like what Minions did in *Despicable Me*. I recorded the dialogue for the characters in English, imported them to Adobe Audition and adjusted the speed and tone of the dialogue. Then I imported the adjusted soundtrack to Premiere and reversed them. In this way, I created the dialogue with no meaning to it but still with the same emotion of the original lines.

For the sound effect, because I didn't have a cat, I had to bring the 702 kit to my friend's apartment to record his cat. It was quite easy with some basic sound such as greeting sound and comfortable sound, but angry sound and fighting sound were very hard. I didn't want to irritate him just for the sound. My friend suggested that I can

come another day when he was about to give the cat a shower, which usually made the cat uncomfortable and lose his temper. That worked pretty well. I got all the sound effects I needed for the cat.

Music played a significant role in my film especially because there was no narration or text in the film. Adding music was almost the last step in my film, but I got into trouble with this last step. My first composer was a student in China, and he finished the first 40 seconds music for my film. After that, he was suddenly assigned a performance task and needed to travel around China to perform, which made it impossible for him to continue work on my thesis. I didn't start finding a substitute composer because I thought it would be better if the whole music were completed by the same people so that the music style would remain the same. And he also promised me that although he was falling behind the schedule, he would catch me up as soon as he finished his performance task. But at two weeks before the SOFA screening, he told me that he could not accomplish it on time because of personal reasons, and he found me another composer who would do the rest work for me. So I had to communicate with the new composer online from the beginning in the last two weeks with a twelve-hour time difference. Well finally we did it, the second composer did a great job. But I believe we could have done better if we had more time on this.



-Final adjustment and rendering

With every piece of this animation finished, what I needed to do was to go through the film, again and again, looking for some issues and problems that can be fixed without too much effort before the final release of the film. This step is very crucial for film production because certain tweaks can make a film better. I made some camera shots adjustments, refined the color and lighting effects, added the student-produced notices and the copyright notice at the end of the film, and checked whether my sound and music volume met the requirement of the SOFA technical specification. I also remapped a few timings and improvised some frames that were not transitioning smoothly in the final film.

After all the work was done, I rendered my film in the following specification:

Title: How to Train Your Dog

Format: A 2D animation film

Length: 4:05

Display Resolution: 1280 x 720 pixels

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Frame Rate: 24 fps

Audio Channels: Stereo

Sample Rate: 48 kHz

Softwares Used: Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Premiere, Tvpaint Animation, Adobe Audition

SCREENING

How to Train Your Dog was screened on May 14th, 2017 at the Carlson auditorium in Rochester Institute of Technology with the extraordinary short animations and live actions from other graduate students. I had a lot of pressure screening my work among those great works. Luckily, my screening went well, and I got some useful responses and criticism from the audiences, some of which were from the perspectives I had never thought before.

In the film I made the alien play fetch with the cat three times with three different balls, a baseball, a basketball and a football. I intended to make it a gag, but Professor Ihab Mardini said that he didn't get that and thought it a little bit repetitive. I believed that he is not the only one had that feeling, some gags in the film didn't work very well.

One of the students claimed that he liked my action sequence in the end and liked the idea that combining the manga style with the animation but he didn't think that my idea got executed effectively. The background of the animation suddenly changed to black and white which made him a little bit confused, and the manga part looked like unfinished. He recommended me to push it more to make the pictures looks more illustrated and maybe use a different type of the brush to make it looks more different from the previous images.

Professor Stephanie Maxwell thought highly of the music in my film. She said the music for the action part works pretty well and it reminded her of an old film named *The Cat from Outer Space*.

Besides, I still got lots of other suggestions on how to improve my film and all of them were precious to me. When I was working on this film, I got so close to it that sometimes I lost myself. Having the chance to present my film to a new audience, who

were unfamiliar with the story, was a very valuable experience. It could lead me and my work to a new destination.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

I had already finished two films in RIT before this one, and I went through the whole process of 2D animation from the concept design to the final editing in all of them, but his project is the one that impressed me the most among all projects I had been working on. I learned a lot during the process.

First of all, I learned how important the storyboard was for animation. I heard of the fact that for most of the TV animation studio in America, they no longer hire animators anymore but only hire storyboard artists instead. They would rather distribute their animation tasks overseas with the storyboard finished by their fantastic artists as the guidance for animators. I understood the importance of the storyboard during my own production. Although I fell behind on the regular schedule my classmates were following, as long as I had a solid storyboard, I can finish my animation on time without much suffering.

Secondly, I understood how important it was to always ask for feedback from other people during the creative process. When you were working on the same subject for a long time, your insight got stuck in what you already had. Discussing with other people will provide you a new perspective towards what you were working on, which may add something new to your story and what's more, it can help you jump out of the maze you have been circling in.

The last but most important thing I learned during my thesis year was practice made progress, not perfect. I think I am still far away from perfect and it's tough for an artist to say that their work is ideal. But we should never stop practicing. To be honest, looking back the film I had finished, I am not satisfied with it. That doesn't mean I didn't work hard enough but means my insight into art got improved during the past

year. What I thought was good enough one year ago was no longer good enough for me anymore. I know I can improve it in many aspects which I didn't know one year ago. Although I am not satisfied with the film, I appreciate the experience of making it very much. During the process, I understood the process of making the animated film better. I realized what I performed not well enough in the process and had the direction to improve myself in the future. I also had my first time collaboration with a composer. I started with a blank page at the beginning of the thesis year and ended with a short finished animated film. I wish I could do better and I will always keep this wish for the further production of my art pieces.

APPENDIX I: ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

Untitled

A 2D Animation Graduate Thesis Production Proposal by

By Zihao Bai

MFA Thesis Proposal

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

March 2016

Approved for submission by

Charles Bandla, Thesis Chair

Logline:

One guy struggles with finding his girlfriend's lost dog, so that he can bring back the dog and cheer her up.

Treatment/Story:

Girlfriend (age 23) is looking for her dog inside an apartment. Boyfriend (age 23) is playing games on a computer. Girlfriend realizes her dog is lost and starts shedding tears while looking at the photos pinned on the wall. Photos indicate the dog is an anniversary present from the boyfriend. The dog has a unique fur pattern of a black spot on one eye.

Boyfriend discovers girl crying. He stops playing his video game and detects where the dog is. He finds some footprints in the kitchen that lead out the kitchen window sill. He looks out the window, and scans the alley behind his apartment.

In the back alley, Boyfriend tracks the clues. He notices garbage cans are overturned, and sees a bitten bone on the ground. He finally sees a dog tail sticking out of a pile of rubbish. He pulls at the tail and out comes the dog. But it is not his girlfriend's dog, it belongs to a mean looking, homeless, wild dog. They have a fight and Boyfriend loses.

Boyfriend walks into a pet shop with his clothes. He asks for a dog that looks like his girlfriend's dog. But the dog with the same fur pattern (black fur spot on eye) is sold out. The Shopkeeper goes into the back of the store, and fakes the spot by taking a white dog and painting black ink around its eye.

Boyfriend bring the dog back and the Girlfriend is super cheerful. She hugs the dog and lightly rub the dog with her face. But her tears of joy blur the pattern on the dog.

The ink contaminates her face. Boyfriend discovers this problem, grabs the dog, and rushes out the room. Girlfriend tries to call him back but fails. Shopkeeper gives Boyfriend a Cat with the same pattern as the lost dog. Boy hesitates but Cat acts cute which makes Boyfriend pay the money.

Boyfriend wants to bring Cat home with a dog leash but Cat doesn't cooperate. Boyfriend takes out a bone to entice Cat but Cat ignores him. He notices Cat doesn't act as his former dog so he tries to train it as tactful as a dog but certainly fails. He walks around Cat and find that Cat's tail is not similar as the other dogs' tails in the shop. What's more, it doesn't wag. So he gets closer and tries to wag the tail with his hand. Cat gets angry and slaps his face with the tail then runs away. Boy chases Cat on to the road and catches Cat then is suddenly hit by a.... bicycle.

Boyfriend is in hospital bed, Cat is walking around on the bed. Girlfriend rushes into the sickroom and sees the cat and the boyfriend. Her eyes fill with tears one more time. Boyfriend is worried because he seems to be failed again. But she rushes to the boyfriend and embraces him tightly. These words appear on the screen:

“A wise lover values not so much the gift of the lover as the love of the giver.”

Rationale:

I enjoy both animation and live action very much. And for me, they are two different ways of storytelling, each with their own unique benefits. I think one of the benefits of animation is that it can tell a story about animals. Because it's really hard and expensive to direct an animal or to make a vivid CG animal in live action. My former two films at RIT are all about human character animation, which means I have little experience in animal animation. So I want to challenge myself with something

different and difficult to gain more experience in animation.

There is an old idiom in China, ‘Your love for a person makes you like the crow that lives on his/her roof.’ That means your affection for someone will expand to things relative to that person. I think this happens a lot between lovestruck couples. In the story, the boy wants to get the lost dog back to cheer the girl up. But the reason for the girl’s sorrow is that the dog is a symbol of boy’s love. She loves the boy so much that she feels really sad when she lost the present from him.

I also admire comedies a lot. It always has lots of potential for gags when a human gets into conflict with an animal. Especially when you want to train a cat behaves like a dog because they are so different kinds of pet.

Support:

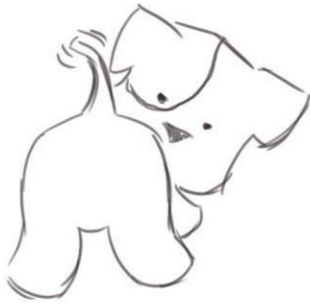
The music of the film will be created by a composer. And two or more voice actors will also be needed. The rest of the film will be finished on my own.

Preparation:

I worked on my last two films in 2D animation and will work on my thesis in 2D using the software that I know. This choice was chosen after careful consideration of the story, concept art, timeline, and my future career plan needs. And the film would be about 6 minutes long that can both train me as a 2D character animator and exhibit my ability in the field as well.

Vision:





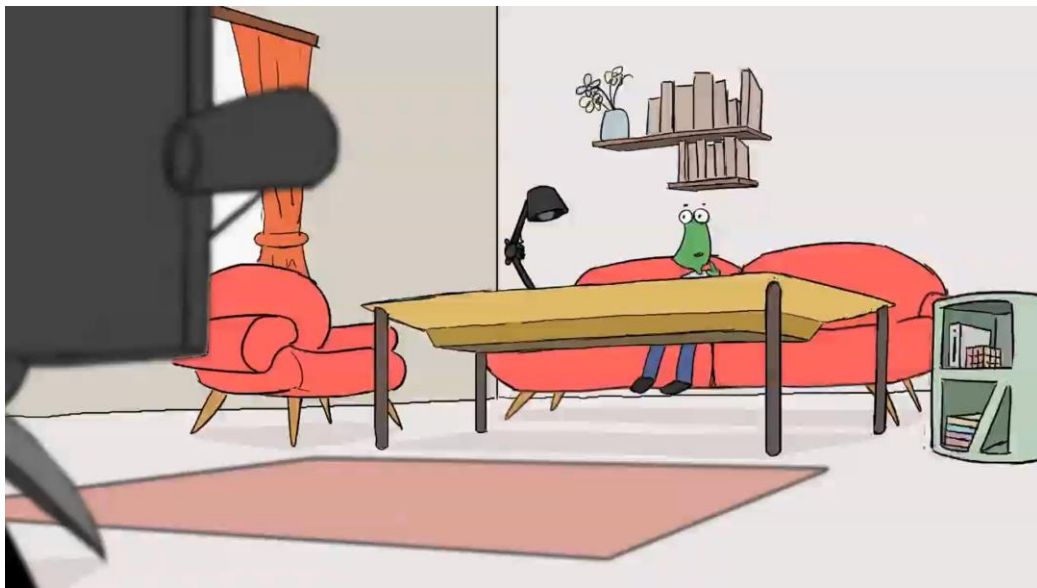
Budget:

Categories and Items	Cost
Work station	
Cintiq 13HD	\$999
Drawing supplies (replacement nibs)	\$10
Sofeware	
TVP Animation 11, student discount	\$560
Adobe Creative Cloud, student discount	\$240
Sound	
Sound Effect	\$150
Composer's compensation	\$300
Voice Actor	\$100
Promotion	
Blu-ray discs+ regular DVDs+ cases	\$50
Print DVD covers	\$50
Festival fees	\$300
Shipping	\$80
Total	\$2839

Timeline:

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Development:															
Treatment															
Script															
Character Designs															
Environment Design															
Storyboard															
Animatic															
Production:															
Keys (rough)															
Extremes (rough)															
Inbetweens (rough)															
Background															
Clean up															
Animation Color															
Background Color															
Special Effects															
sound design:															
music															
voice															
SFX															
post-production:															
composite															
edit															

APPENDIX II: SCREENSHOTS





How To Train Your DOG



