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R·I·T

Behind the Door

By

Pengxu Cheng

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

April, 2019

Committee Approval:

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ABSTRACT

Behind the Door is a three-minute, nineteen-second 2D animation film. This story is about three rabbits, a hunter and a wolf and is told in two segments. The first segment of the film tells a linear story of a hunter who hunts rabbits, but fails continuously. The second segment of the film is told from the angle of the rabbits and a wolf. The wolf wants to hunt the rabbits, but also fails to catch them. The hunter also hunts the wolf, but the wolf outsmarts him. Although the rabbits are small and vulnerable animals, in this story they work together and become the final victors.

Inspiration for the story structure and concepts in *Behind the Door* came from the study of the films of director Guy Ritchie. In his films, he uses a similar style of showing an event from different points of view to reveal to the audience what actually happens.

This thesis paper will discuss the entire making of *Behind the Door*. This includes the animation workflow and details of production. *Behind the Door* is a motion graphics-style animation that was created using the computer software Adobe After Effects. Illustration was accomplished in Adobe Photoshop and Flash, and the compositing and editing were achieved in Adobe Premiere Pro. The music for the film is an original score.

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INTRODUCTION

My Master of Fine Arts graduate thesis animation film, *Behind the Door* began in January 2017 with the Thesis Preparation Seminar course in the School of Film and Animation, and the work was completed for the final screening on the RIT campus in May 2018. I had encountered many problems during the thesis period. However, these were solved thanks to my thesis committee members: Stephanie Maxwell, Peter Murphey, and Shaun Foster. They gave me so much help and advice so I could adjust and fix problems.

My story was inspired by the life experience of my childhood living in a rural village where the people were too kind to harm any little creatures, who constantly annoyed them and damaged their livestock and their fields. Those who were extremely nice would even create a special feeding spot for the misbehaving animals, and this practice may have been common in many rural agricultural communities. However, the essence of my story would be how to maintain the harmony of the ecosystem when human activities are destructive. Animals risk their lives in scavenging on the territories of humans, outside of their own natural habitats. But because humans have expanded so rapidly across nature, nowadays animals have less habitat and the border areas next to populated areas. What makes me sad is that most people choose to have blinders on when destroying nature to develop lands for their living spaces. So, I wanted to write a story to tell people that maybe we are not the only hunters in this world and we should be careful.

The first challenge for me was the story development. My first version of the story structure was very linear. It was a very flat, and was the simple story of a hunter who is hunting a wolf. The wolf gets away, and then becomes the hunter of the man. But somehow, they both get into trouble by falling into a hole and neither of them can get out. They both wind up helping each other to solve the problem. At the end of the story, the two 'hunters' become good friends. It is meant to be a very cartoon style animation. But, the faculty committee that reviewed my proposal felt that the story was too predictable and they wanted me to continue to develop the story. So, I made revisions on the initial story and came up with something more original and unique. I framed the story so that the weakest character would be the human hunter and the rabbits and a wolf were the smartest and cleverest and the most powerful. The animals are the victors in the end.

Behind the Door starts with the consequences of such short-sighted expectations by human beings and is dedicated to depicting the same story from different points of view. I wanted to raise awareness and empathy in the viewer, especially in those who are used to thinking myopically and selfishly about themselves, rather than for the greater good. My film benefited from studying the movies of Guy Ritchie, where I learned concepts of using multiple narrative story angles, the creative manipulation of the camera, fast-paced montage, and developing an understanding of timing of action and shots within a film. Because I added a team of rabbits to upset the balance of the struggle between the hunter and the wolf and developed a unique story structure, the

work became more dynamic and interesting. The faculty committee finally passed my thesis proposal and I could begin work on the film.

The major challenge of making this film was to tell the same story from three different perspectives – the hunter, the rabbits, and the wolf. It meant that I would be telling the story from three different points of view. I referenced many other films in order to understand how to control the different perspectives of characters. I also took several motion graphics courses that allowed me to discover how to tell my story better in my film. However, due to the purpose and work flow differences between animation and motion graphics softwares, and because I used After Effects to animate with, I needed to manually alter the animation of the film in a frame by frame manner to make it more vivid. Some of the problems encountered in the filmmaking process almost destroyed my confidence as a filmmaker and animator and made me want to give up. For example, the different softwares I used to make the film were not compatible with each other. Like, when an image created in vector format might not be opened correctly in Adobe After Effects. Or, the skeleton of a character in Adobe After Effects might perform perfectly on one day, but might crash for no reason the next day. I spent tons of time adjusting the parameters of the software so that I could work confidently and quickly with creating imagery, and to try the different combinations and experiment with the softwares.

My film production workflow for this film was 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 producing an animatic. Production usually is character animation and inking and coloring. Post-production includes compositing and final editing, music composition, and sound effects. My pipeline followed the traditional pipeline, with the exception that during Production, I included the character and environment creation, rigging, animation and rendering. (Details are given below.)

Behind the Door - THE PROCESS

PRE-PRODUCTION

Story Development

It is quite difficult to create an interesting and meaningful story, and especially then make it into an animated film. I originally planned to write an interesting story with a clear narrative structure, but I found it hard to maintain the balance of these two. That means the simple linear narrative structure is the best choice for a clear story structure. But such storytelling is humdrum with a plain storyline, and the viewer might also be unable to maintain interest and curiosity throughout the story plot. However, in my film I decided to create a fascinating animated story, with an unexpected plot reversal and using non-stereotypical character designs to spice up the story. To accomplish this, I was faced with a huge problem, which was to find a way to reverse the outcome of a traditional story and make the human the loser and the animals the winners and also make the whole story clear and interesting.

In my first story version, I chose two characters that could represent the 'hunter' archetype best: human hunters and wolves, both of which stand for the strongest hunters in different environments. In my story, the hunter and the wolf live around the same mountain, where the wolf wants to have a taste of human flesh and the hunter

expects to catch the wolf for its skin. They both think about hunting each other. During an occasional encounter, the wolf catches the hunter's attention, so that the hunter begins to hunt and chase the wolf. But, the wolf successfully escapes the hunter's attempts to kill him using his rifle. At the same time, the wolf returns to his forest and prepares for revenge and plans to catch the hunter. The wolf makes a trap and then seduces the hunter to chase him again. As expected, the hunter falls into the trap while chasing the wolf, but he, by chance, hooks the wolf with a rope and drags the wolf into the hole with him. In the trap, the hunter and wolf confront each other. But then, they both feel scared and helpless. Finally, they wind up helping each other to get out of the hole. They become good friends. This is a typical linear narrative story, but with a reversal ending. But this reversal ending relied merely on the simple plot.

I started a detailed study of Guy Ritchie's films. Ritchie is my favorite film director. He is also a very successful screenwriter and producer. Inspired by his best-known film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* I realized that it is possible to add some fresh twists in the story structure instead of creating animation merely by adopting linear narrative structure. Guy Ritchie's unique multiple points-of-view narrative structure really inspired me and I decided that I could adopt a similar strategy in the telling of my story. So, I added a naughty team of rabbits in the second story version of script. The second story version presented simultaneous perspectives from the hunter, rabbit and wolf. The hunter chases the wolf to a cave and gives up because of fear. The wolf chases the rabbit whom deliberately leads him to the hunter. The rabbits sneak into the hunter's cabin and plunder his food and destroy the cabin when the hunter is chasing the wolf.

Throughout this new version of the story, it seems that everything is controlled by the weakest animals that beat both the wolf and the hunter. At the end of the story, the rabbit is the biggest winner.

The application of this new story structure made the story more exciting and inspiring to me. When looking back to the original intention of creating a story script, I think that my new story had a properly balanced and clear narrative structure, an interesting plot and the unexpected reversal ending. During the process of the story creation, I learned a lot about narrative storytelling in general. By continuously improving the story, I further enhanced my knowledge and artistic understanding of animation.

Character Design

In the first version of my story, the main roles were the hunter and the wolf. Because of the needs of the story, I wanted to show that both of them are known for being the some of the strongest hunters in nature. For the hunter, I decided to exaggerate his design so that he was tall, mighty, had cold, beady eyes, and a long, full beard. His costume would be a typical outfit with a wool, plaid shirt and jeans.^(Fig. 1) For the design of the wolf, I followed typical physical characteristics of Siberian wolves, i.e., large, but slender and massively strong in the back and legs.^(Fig. 2) In the first version of the story, it was hoped that the two powerful hunters would collide in conflict when they would encounter each other.

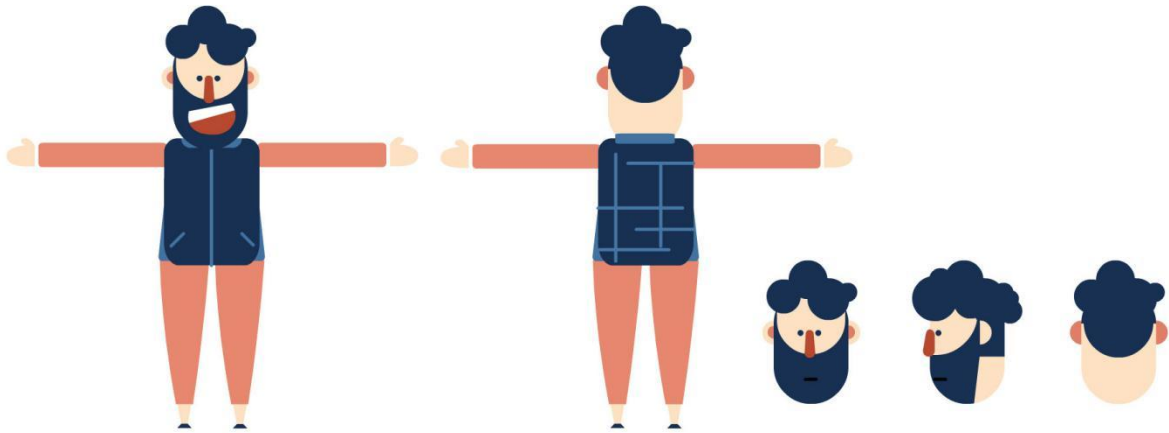


Figure 1: Hunter character design, 1st story version



Figure 2: Wolf character design, 1st story version

In the second version of the story, in the character designs, I made better use of details and forms to shape the characters, so as to better express their individual natures. (Fig. 3)

I added a character who symbolizes wisdom, the rabbit. The whole story is manipulated by the rabbit. When designing the rabbit, I wanted to not only show its vulnerable and innocent nature, but also present its powerfully clever and witty characteristics. For me, the changing of the shapes of the rabbit's eyes would reflect its general character, from innocence to shrewd and evil. Rabbits fight each and in my film. I also designed several rabbits of various sizes and colors to distinguish each individual with different eye features.

In this second version of the story, I created a completely different image of the hunter different from the one in the first version. The new design was to make him look like a 'silly loser', with features like obesity, griminess and clumsiness, wearing dirty clothes and a big dirty beard and drinker's big nose.

For the design of the wolf, both its quickness and agility and its lack of experience and cunning would be emphasized. I chose exaggerated squares to shape its body that would move well, but the eyes would convey its inexperience through its triangular red shapes that could change through squinting actions.

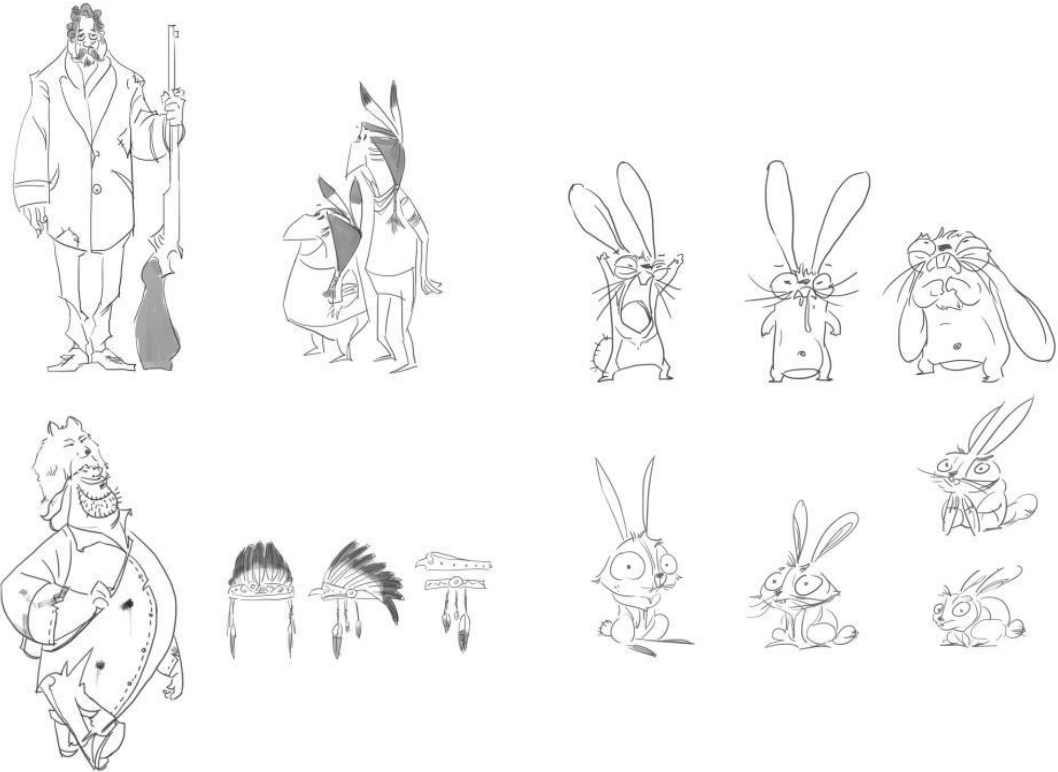


Figure 3: Character designs for 2nd story version

Background Design

Since my animation has a motion graphic style, background design played a very important role in the work. I selected some classic Disney forest scenes as a reference, and I used the most popular noise brush to color and texturize the background, hoping to achieve an effect of motion graphics animation with an illustration style. Similarly, in this film, the use of color was also crucial. Warm forest colors were selected to dominate the background. Wolves and the hunter were created with cool colors to contrast with the warmer colors for the rabbits. This difference in the color of the rabbits also suggests their difference from the other characters and hint at their importance in the outcome of the story. (Warm colors usually represent justice.)^(Fig. 4)





Figure 4: Panels showing color palettes for environments and characters.

Top is Disney reference. Middle two panels are background designs in the film, and bottom panel show color palette for characters.

Storyboard

Storyboard is the most important part in creating the whole animation film. It controls the story style, and details of shots, characters, and action. A good animation starts with a good storyboard. It was my intention to create an animation of high quality, so I studied two aspects of storytelling. Firstly, I took a course on storyboard design on the Internet. From this course, I learned many techniques of creating a storyboard, such as using various types of 'lens spaces' at different times and moments within an animation, including the basic shot, wide shot, medium shot, close-up shot, and some specialized shots, such as over the shoulder, side shot, up and down shot, tracking shot, etc. I also learned when to set the best shot for various situations and how to smooth the transition from one shot to the next. The storyboard design course really taught me a lot. When I finished the sketch drawing of my film storyboard,^(Fig. 5) I put all the storyboard 'shots' into Adobe Premiere, which would allow me to work with the timing, the most important aspect of the film, and modify timing quickly and conveniently. It also accelerated my work progress.

The other important study I engaged in in order to understand storytelling better was simply watching movies. I looked for the shots I envisioned for my film in other films of many types. I analyzed the layout of the shots in whole movies, and explored how to make my pictures work in my animation so that they would be correct and beautiful and understandable, which would be key to its success.

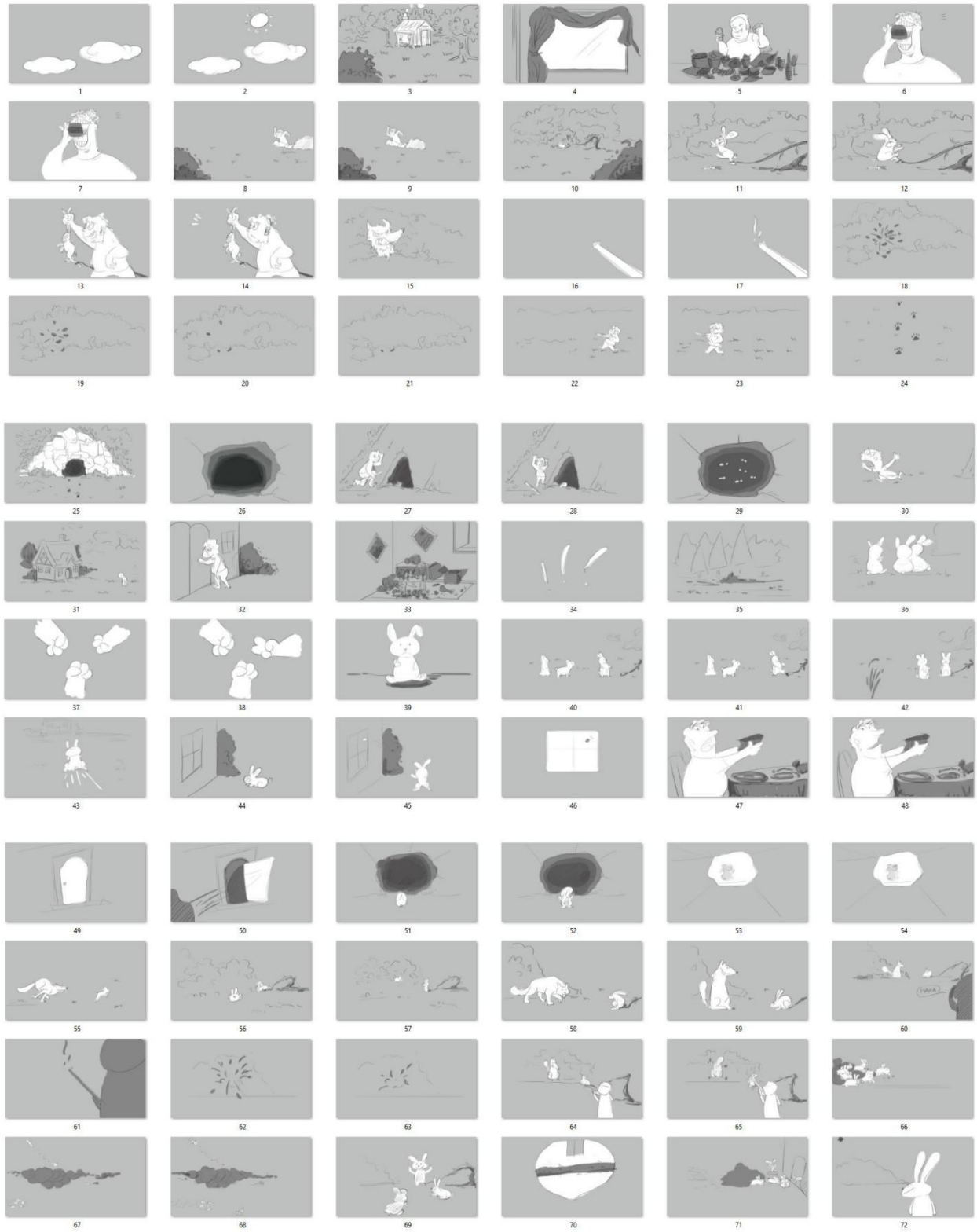


Figure 5. Final version of the storyboard

Animatic

After completing the storyboard, I began the creation of the animatic based on the storyboard. The effect of completion of the in-betweens of the keyframes is way to measure create the timing.^(Fig. 6) But, without completing a full shot one can still predict the timing of shots on the animatic. I did a lot of experiments with timing and the various transitions between different shots. I also reviewed some successful cartoons to examine shot timings and transitions. After studying many meaningful animation film references, I felt I could easily develop any effect that I wanted. When I finally created a successful animatic, I was able to use this animatic to guide my animation. This not only improved the production pipeline efficiency, but also benefited the final film production by reducing production time.

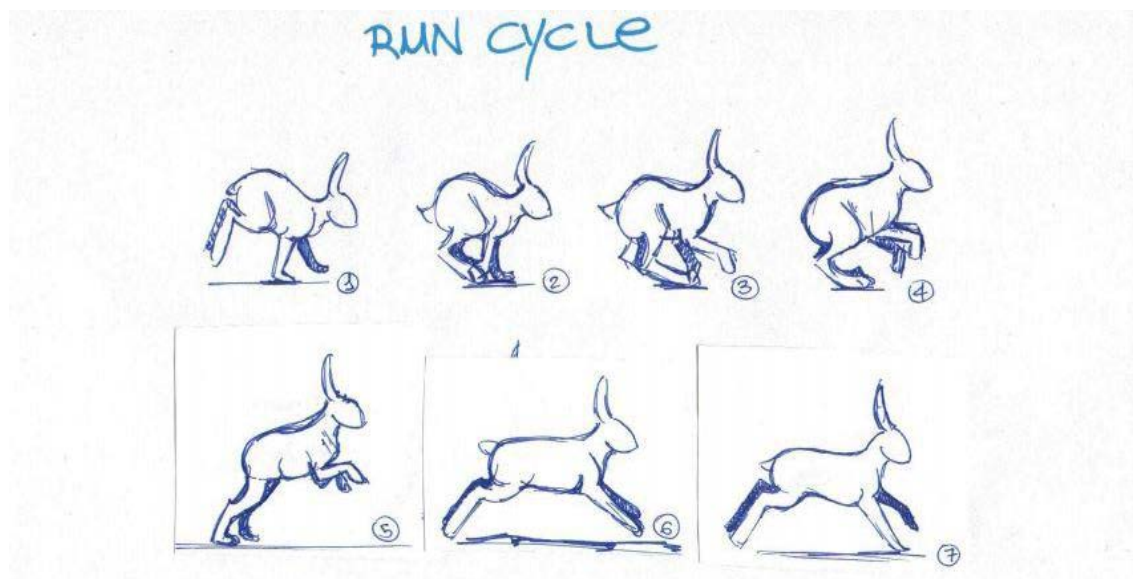


Figure 6: A run cycle to show in-betweens

(Image source: <https://edimassimo.files.wordpress.com/2011/12hare-run-cycle.jpg>)

Shot List and Timeline

Shot list and timeline are the last steps before the start of animation production (animating shots). Before animation production, one needs to first complete a production plan and calculate how many backgrounds, and key frames and drawings in between frames need to be made. A shot list and timeline present a plan for each shot of the work and the schedule of activities and procedures that must be accomplished to create the work. The planned animation production needs to be in agreement with the shot list and timeline. The shot list and the timeline effectively helped me manage my production time. I could easily estimate whether I was behind schedule or not, and I was able to easily check the production progress over a certain period of time.^(Fig. 7)

1	WEEK	PRE-PRO	MUSIC	SOUND	MODEL	TEXTURE	RIGGING	LAYOUT	ANIMATION	FX	LIGHTING	RENDERING	COMPOSITING	EDIT
2	1	Dec 14	Story concept + visual reference											
3	2	Dec 21	CHARACTER/SETDESIGN+SHOT LIST											
4	3	Dec 28												
5	4	Jan 4	STORYBOARDS		25%									STORYBOARDS
6	5	Jan 11				25%	25%							STORYBOARDS
7	6	Jan 18	DONE		50%	50%	50%							STORYBOARDS, TIMING,
8	7	Jan 25	ANIMATIC 50%			50%								ANIMATIC
9	8	Feb 1	fixes if needed		DONE		DONE							ANIMATIC
10	10	Feb 15	revised animatic		fixes	DONE	fixes if needed	plan out scene breaks and blocking	thumbnail main actions		color script			ANIMATIC
11	11	Feb 22	ANIMATIC DONE			fixes	fixes if needed	25%	movement/acting research		Lighting/mood research			
12	12	Mar 1	ending/resolution fix if needed				Shot-specific rigging	50%	movement/acting research		color script			PLAYBLASTS, SOUND FX
13	13	Mar 8					FX-related rigging	DONE	shoot video reference		Lighting/mood research			
14	14	Mar 15					fixes	25%						
15	15	Mar 29					ending fix if needed				25%			
16	16	Apr 5												
17	17	Apr 12								DONE				
18	18	Apr 19							50%		50%	25%	NUKE TUTORIAL RESEARCH	RENDERED FOOTAGE
19	19	Apr 26		25%									25%	RENDERED FOOTAGE, MUSIC
20	20	May 3												RENDERED FOOTAGE, MUSIC
21	21	May 10		50%							DONE	50%	50%	
22	22	May 17		DONE					DONE					
23	23	May 24										DONE		
24	24	May 31											DONE	DONE
25	25	Jun 7												
26	22	Jun 14			DONE									

Figure 7: The timeline for production of Behind the Door

PRODUCTION

Introduction

After completing the pre-production on *Behind the Door*, I entered the stage for officially making the animation, the production stage. I needed to complete four different steps during this production stage, namely character and environment creation, rigging, animation, and rendering. Unlike the procedures to make a traditional 2D animation, my animation was mainly created using Adobe After Effects software. Since I had never completed an animation using Adobe After Effects before, it was a huge challenge for me to learn the techniques of creating animation in After Effects. There was a lot of practical knowledge to absorb. At times I became afraid of being unable to finish my animation on time, and I was really nervous and depressed during these times. So, I am very grateful to my professor, Stephanie Maxwell for providing me with a lot of suggestions and reference videos and inspiration as I readied myself to make the animation. I not only learned a lot, but these activities also directly influenced the design style of my characters and backgrounds. In addition, she expected that I would need sufficient time to study and experiment and learn. The Motion Graphics course at the School of Visual Arts during the summer break really helped me learn the motion graphic production process. Though the course only lasted for a few months, the learning experience greatly enlightened me on how to make animations by making use motion graphics techniques.

Character and Background Creation

After I completed the design of the characters and backgrounds, the next thing to do was to select the basic colors, and determine the basic color numbers of the characters and backgrounds. (I referenced colors on *dribbble.com*.^(Fig. 8)) Compared with traditional procedures for making 2D animations, i.e. drawing the sketch first and then coloring, my production process was much simpler. The colored backgrounds and characters were completed directly in Adobe Flash. The only thing I had to pay attention to was during the process of coloring the backgrounds of the characters, I needed to divide one image into several layers and process them one by one.^(Fig. 9) After coloring, the image with pure color was imported into Adobe Photoshop for texture mapping using the 'noisy brush', so that my images could be better stylized. As for the creation of the characters and backgrounds, the most difficult part was using the noisy brush because it is not easy to control. I had to spend sufficient time practicing using the brush, and fortunately I was able to master it and apply it skillfully in the end.



Figure 8: Color reference from dribbble.com created by artist febin_raj

<https://dribbble.com/Febinraj>



Figure 9: Separation of multiple layers and their composites of characters and backgrounds

Rigging

After dividing the images into several layers for coloring and texture mapping one by one, they were imported into Adobe After Effects layer by layer. The rigging part of production was processed in two parts. First, for the background images, I rigged a background with the “Puppet Pin Tool” that comes with Adobe After Effects. Rigging this way allowed animation motion to be quickly adjusted, which was very convenient for me. Second, I used “PuppetTools 3” to rig the characters. As a paid-for Adobe After Effects plug-in, PuppetTools 3.(Fig. 10 and Fig. 11) was very convenient and easy to use, and it greatly improved my efficiency in production.

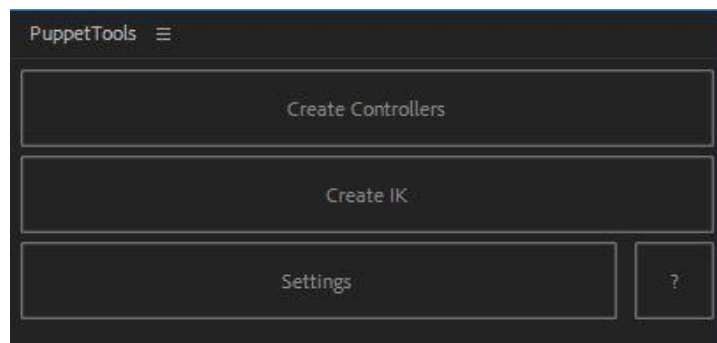


Figure 10: PuppetTools 3 information screen in Adobe After Effects

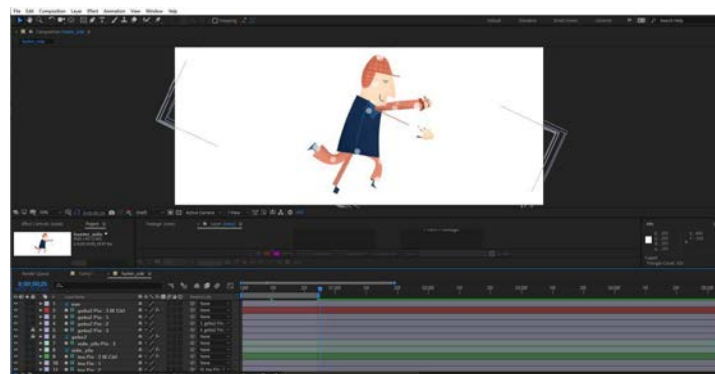
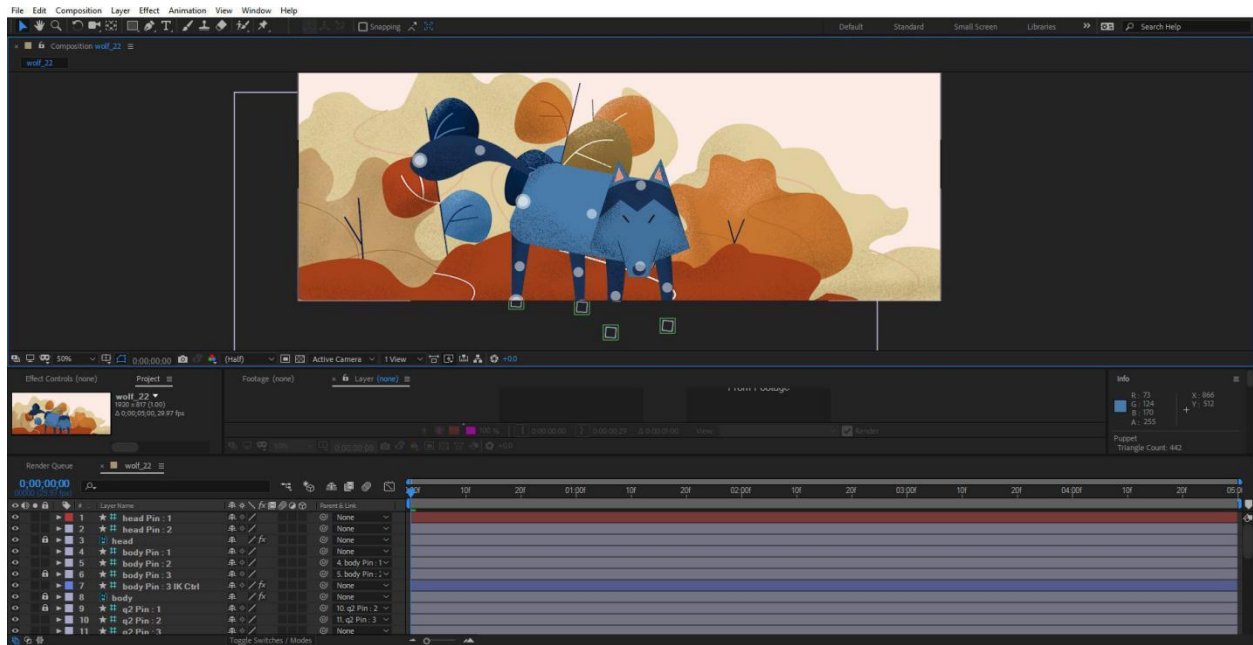


Figure 11: Rigging process with Puppet Tools 3 in Adobe After Effects

Animation

When it came to making the drawings move, which is critical to achieve a smooth, continuous and successful animated work, basic animation principles became the biggest challenge I had to face. Since the animation needed to be created after the rigging of characters, I needed to proficiently apply basic animation principles. While creating and adjusting the animation, I studied and applied and imitated many different principles of animation. Movements of the wolf and the rabbits were especially tricky to understand and master in animation. I have never observed wolves in nature and my exposure to rabbits has been limited. So, I needed to study these creatures and their movements. Therefore, I watched various videos on wolves and rabbits on YouTube and Google for reference. Also, *Richard Williams* classic animation guide book of *The Animator's Survival Kit*, really helped me to understand movement, poses and in-betweens. (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13)





Figures 12 and 13: Work in progress showing in between and key frame.

One other problem that bothered me a lot was that there are generally two types of animals in animation, namely anthropomorphic animals and animalized animals. After a long period of consideration, I chose animalized animals so to separate my animals from human beings. After all, my animation tells the story of humans at odds with nature, so I hoped to use relatively realistic movements to reflect the differences between animals and human beings, and highlight that people should respect nature.

Rendering

The rendering part of animation is relatively easy. Since I made the animation shots following the plan and rhythm of the storyboard, and after all the shots were completed, they were stitched together in Adobe Premiere Pro and then exported. However, during rendering, I found that the software was likely to crash if shots were too complex and this was rather frustrating. I believe that the software crash might have been caused by the overloaded Adobe Premiere Pro renderer. So instead, I used Adobe Media Encoder as the render output. This experience made me realize that we should never trust software too much, or at least we should not rely too much on it.

POST-PRODUCTION

Compositing

In the process of creating *Behind the Door*, my steps were the same as for traditional 2D animation. The biggest problem in post productions was the compositing and editing of shots together. I created Plan B storyboards to discover the possibilities for editing my shots together in certain areas of the film as was creating the final film version. I created these different storyboards using Photoshop, and then imported each of the storyboards into Adobe Premiere Pro and merged them onto the timeline. By arranging and rearranging these different storyboards in Adobe Premiere Pro, I came to clearly see their potential as well as timing and camera effects (using “Easy” After Effects) in certain areas of the film to adjust ease ins and outs. I also added some special effects and transitions. In some background scenes, I adopted Gaussian Blur to separate the foreground and background to create scene depth and I also did camera some effects, like rack focusing, which helped to highlight the characters. After adding the special effects through Adobe After Effects, I needed to export the special effect shots, import them into Adobe Premiere Pro and complete the fine edit of the work. It is worth noting that there are a lot of shots and bridging shots when creating animation films, which is very easy to cause confusion in final Adobe Premiere Pro synthesis. Thus, each single shot needs to be numbered once being completed. The next step after the fine edit was the addition of music.

Music and Sound Effects

I feel so happy to have worked with the excellent composer, Alexander Blu. I found him on the Internet. We discussed the film and I sent him the animatic to begin with during pre-production. Eventually, I sent him the fine cut of the work so he could complete the music score. During the last month of post-production on *Behind the Door*, we interacted through Skype to exchange ideas and reactions to both the music and the picture. His music turned out to be very dynamic and worked well with the visuals. For example, I think the background music for the rabbit part in the second half of the animation is the best. The cheerful rhythm creates a sense that the rabbits will be the final winners and implies that the story is ending. Apart from being a composer, Alexander also writes stories, so he gave me a lot of useful suggestions during my story creation, such as giving the rabbits a key role in the film.

I recorded all special effect sounds in the animation using the 702 kit of the School of Film and Animation equipment cage.

For sound effects, I could simply simulate the sounds of the rabbits and wolf, and then import them into Adobe Audition for sound processing.^(Fig. 14) Since the soundtrack consisted of music and sound effects, I needed to create the sounds of the rabbits or the wolf in special ways that would give their sounds and utterances emotional emphasis, such as the rabbits expressing happiness or the wolf sounding disappointed. Creating these sound effects and voice simulations was new to me. And I enjoyed it very much.

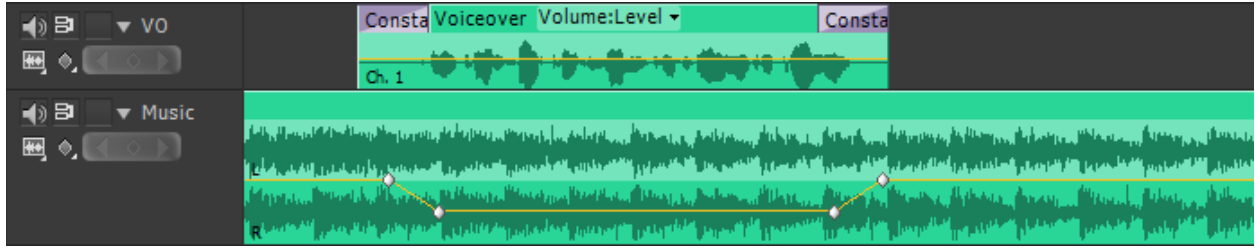


Figure 14: Voice editing

Final Adjustment and Rendering

After completing all the parts of the film, I checked all the shots repeatedly. I added two changes in motion graphic effects to the section connecting the story's two plots, so as to properly remind the audiences that of a turning point in the story. I also added the SOFA credit and copyright statement at the end of the film. For the final sound, I confirmed that the sound volume requirements met SOFA technical specifications. After completing all final adjustments and tasks, I rendered the film in accordance with the following specifications:

Working Title: Behind the Door

Director: Pengxu Cheng

Advisor: Stephanie Maxwell

Technique: 2D animation

Start Date: August 2017

End Date: May 2018

Run Time: 03:19

Display Resolution: 1920 x 816 pixels

Format: DVD, .mov file

SCREENING

Behind the Door premiered on May 6th, 2018 in the Carlson Auditorium at Rochester Institute of Technology in a program of short animation and live action works created by fellow graduate students in SOFA.

The screening went well. The audience had many good comments about the work and a lot of suggestions on how to improve my films. I valued their comments very much. Professor Dave Sluberski gave me a new interpretation of the film, suggesting that in the film the rabbit can either be the best or the worst character. My ending is open, not committing to who is the 'bad guy' in the story. It's always a risk to leave the ending open, because it might be confusing and unsatisfying if not done right. Professor Mari Blanchard had high praise for the illustration style and presentation in the film. She expressed her like for the illustration design and character shaping. She commented that I used color and the noise brush very well. This animation was very much a manifestation of personal style.

When I was creating this animation I sometimes was at a loss in deciding what style I should pursue. But, fortunately the style I adopted really worked - it worked for audiences and for me.

Creating *Behind the Door* was an invaluable experience that has inspired me to keep growing as an artist and it was also a major turning point in my life.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

Before coming to the United States, I had independently completed two animation films. During the making of these films I was involved in many processes, from conceptual design to final dubbing. But, I also felt very confused about my future. I am fortunate that I came to the United States and studied animation and earned my Master of Fine Arts at RIT.

These three years of education have become the most precious time in my life because I have learned and practiced knowledge that will be useful for a lifetime. I have also learned the unique learning qualities of Americans. All my American friends have been working hard and are learning constantly every day. This may be the so-called 'live to learn' trait that Americans seem to possess. I also learned that the most important aspect of any production is the workflow. No matter what you do, it must be a priority to improve the workflow before starting. This is the correct and efficient way of working. Reflecting on my past, I think that my chaotic undergraduate studies were the result of not having a reasonable workflow. However, it was also during that chaotic period that I learned how important it is to sort out the workflow.

Everyone must learn to grow up. Although I feel it is still necessary to keep learning and improving my abilities, I feel that I have found a way to achieve near perfection in accomplishing a work and that is finding the correct workflow and pursuing with

continuous endeavors. I think I will ultimately achieve my dreamed perfection someday in the future.

I am not totally satisfied with my thesis film, but I really appreciate the experience I acquired from making it, which allowed me to comprehend the whole process of creating making an animated cartoon. Also, I was able to realize several of my shortcomings and then muster the determination for improvement. For the first time, I worked with a composer. It was the first time I worked animating animals and making a positive statement about nature and the human disruption of nature that will have negative effects. I hope to always improve and do better. I feel I will always sustain a desire and passion to further my art.

APPENDIX I: ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

Animals on the Totem Pole

(Working Title)

A 2D Animation Graduate Thesis Production Proposal
by
Pengxu Cheng

MFA Thesis Proposal
School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute of Technology,
Rochester, New York, 2017

Approved for submission by:

Professor Stephanie Maxwell, Thesis Chair
School of Film and Animation

Title: Animals on the Totem Pole

Director/Animator: Pengxu Cheng

Genre: 2D Narrative

Length: 3 minutes

Log Line

A tale on the true place of Man amongst the animals around him.

Story Structure

This tale is told in two segments. One is a linear telling of the Hunter as the protagonist of the story. The second segment is told from the angle of the Rabbits and the Wolf. The story will be revealed as a tale at the end of the film, being told by an old Indian Man to a group of modern day Indian children.

The Hunter

In the great wilds on Alaska, a Hunter lives in a small wooden cabin along a lake on the edge of a great, dense forest.

There is a vast pile of wood alongside the cabin where the Hunter is finishing stacking the last few pieces of wood for the heavy winter to come. The Hunter stops and wipes sweat from his dirty face with a dirty rag from his back pocket. He gazes at the sky and his attention is drawn to the distant, high mountaintops where snow clouds are beginning to appear. His surroundings are still green in the pine tree landscape that stretch before him across a large, calm lake. The reflections in the lake mirror the landscape almost perfectly, until the flocks of geese floating on the surface of the water suddenly launch into flight and soar noisily through the air in V formations heading south. The Hunter raises his arms in the air and angrily shouts at the geese and then spits on the ground.

The Hunter watches the sky winter clouds begin to gather more quickly. A cold wind crosses the lake and chills him. He covers the woodpile with tarps and heads into his cabin and closes the door.

Winter comes. Outside snow covers everything. Inside the cabin everything glows in warm oranges and yellows from a bright fire burning in the fireplace. There are supplies for winter everywhere in the cabin. Dried fish hang from the ceiling; hundreds of furs from all kinds of animals (rabbit, wolf, deer, beaver, fox and mountain lion) dry on racks near the fire. There are crates of carrots and cabbages, boxes of cereals and grains, and cases of dehydrated foods. The Hunter is greedily devouring a bowl of oatmeal and gulping coffee alone at a table.

Suddenly, he hears a loud noise and the cry of an animal outside. The Hunter quickly pulls on his fur boots and bear coat, grabs his rifle and hurries out of the cabin. He finds a grey Rabbit nearby with his paw stuck in the Hunter's animal trap. He moves towards the animal and raises his rifle and laughs with the intention to kill the Rabbit. But, then he quickly notices that there is a Wolf approaching the Rabbit from some nearby bushes. The Wolf is looking at the Rabbit with hungry red eyes. Immediately, the Hunter turns the gun to the Wolf and fires. He misses as the Wolf jumps quickly away and runs. The Hunter grumbles, but then laughs as he begins to chase the Wolf, leaving the Rabbit in the trap.

The Hunter follows the Wolf's foot tracks in the snow for hours until he comes to a river where he loses the Wolf. The Hunter hears a wolf howling from a distant, far off mountain. He gives up his search for the Wolf and turns back towards his cabin.

The Hunter enters his cabin. It is a mess. Everything is torn apart and all of his winter food is gone. The Hunter is very shocked and upset and let's out a wild scream, "AHHHHHHHH". A snowstorm comes and buries the cabin.

The Rabbits and Wolf

The Hunter's story ends, and now we see it from a different perspective and what really happened.

Early in the morning, in a grass clearing of snowy forest, one grey, one brown and a white rabbits are playing the hand game called, Up or Down* The grey rabbit has lost. The three together hop away toward the Hunter's cabin on the edge of the woods.

Near the cabin, they arrive at the Hunter's animal trap, which is set waiting for a passing animal. The brown and the white rabbit trigger the trap using a stick that wedges inside the trap and leaves it slightly open. The grey rabbit puts his leg into the trap very slowly and lies down. The white rabbit leaves the others and disappears into the forest. The two other rabbits wait quietly. The other white Rabbits throws a stone to the glass window of the Hunter's cabin.

The white Rabbit arrives in the front of a Wolf's cave, swinging his little tail, shaking his body and squeaking noisily to lure the Wolf. The Wolf jumps out of the cave and spots the Rabbit, who begins to run away. The Wolf chases after the rabbit.

Meanwhile the White Rabbit back at the trap throws a stone and hits the window of the Hunter with a noisy bang. The Hunter looks up from a bowl of oatmeal he is eating and emerges from his cabin with a rifle in his hands. The White Rabbit disappears in some nearby bushes. The Hunter sees the Grey Rabbit in the trap and walks towards it. He raises his rifle to kill the Grey Rabbit.

The Wolf, who has been following the Brown Rabbit arrives at the Hunter's animal trap and spots the Grey Rabbit caught in the trap with the Hunter nearby aiming his rifle at the "trapped" Rabbit.

The Hunter spots the Wolf looking at his prey. He turns his rifle towards the Wolf and fires, but misses. The Wolf runs away and the Hunter starts to chase the Wolf through the woods.

The Grey Rabbit jumps out of the trap with the help of the Brown Rabbit.

Suddenly, a horde of rabbits burst out from the woods. The rabbits go wild and enter the Hunter's cabin, grabbing food, knocking over furniture, breaking glass, eating everything in sight. One small rabbit stays outside and raises his head into the air sniffing for the scent of the for the Hunter's return.

A while later, the small rabbit smells the Hunter coming back in the distance, he bleats to all the rabbits to immediately evacuate. The rabbits run away into the forest. When the Hunter enters the house he finds all of his food is gone and the cabin is wrecked, and he screams in anger! Immediately, he is metamorphosed into a figure at the bottom of a wooden Northwest Pacific Coast style totem pole, with the figures of animals carved into the wood above him.

The voice of an old Indian man says, "Now you see my children, Man must protect and not take too much from the Earth Mother." The Old Indian Man sits around a campfire with children while ending his tale.

**Up and Down is a child's game of chance, where three players on cue put their hands out, either up or down, and the one player whose hand is oriented different from two has to perform some special deed.*

Rationale:

The relationship of man with nature is important to keep in balance, according to Pacific Northwest Indian mythology. This kind of tale is very common in many indigenous communities...about the white man and his greed and disregard for nature. The structure of my story begin inside the tale and ends with it being told by an Indian to a gathering of Indians. I need to figure out how to effectively and briefly move from the tale to the narrated tale telling.

Also, I would like to add some of my favorite film concepts to the animation story, such as the film structure of Guy Ritchie. In his films he uses a similar style of showing an event from different points of view to reveal to the audience what really happened.

Support:

The music of the film will be created by a composer.

Art Style:

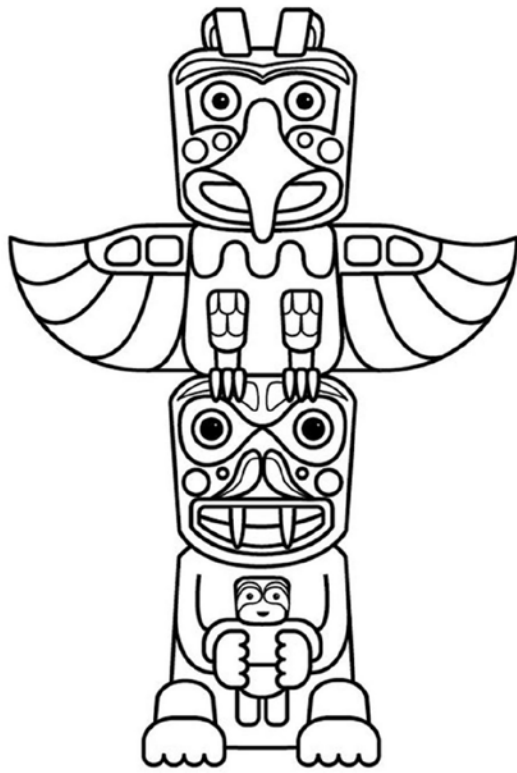
The style will have a motion graphic approach in the animation, using a bright and colorful palette, heavily shadowed and simplified forms, and backgrounds made in 3D but look like 2D.

The sound track will be a dramatic sound effects and music track with exaggerations in mood and tone, with the quality of dark humor suggested throughout.









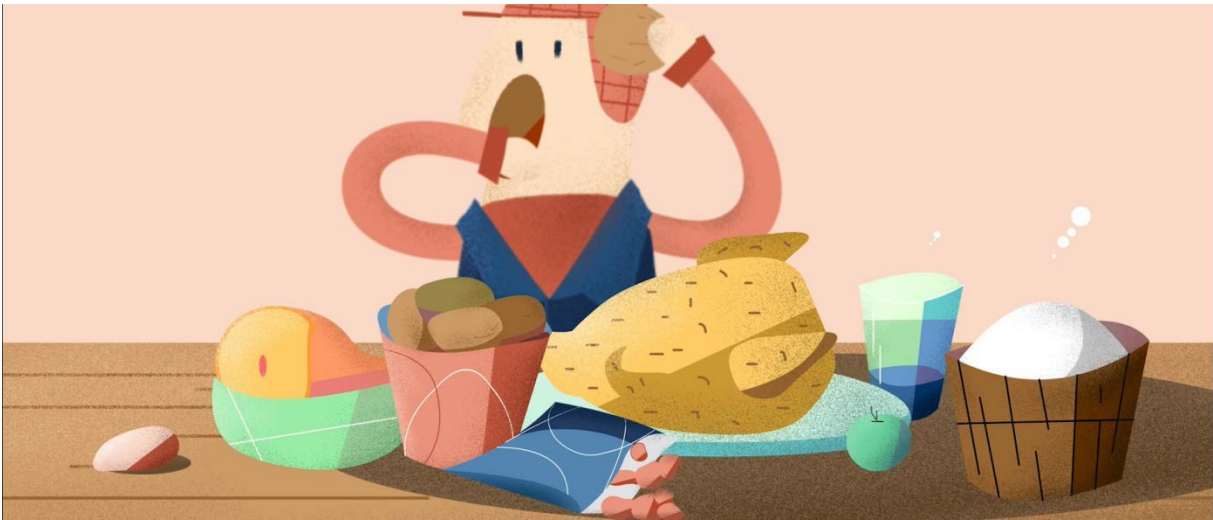
Budget:

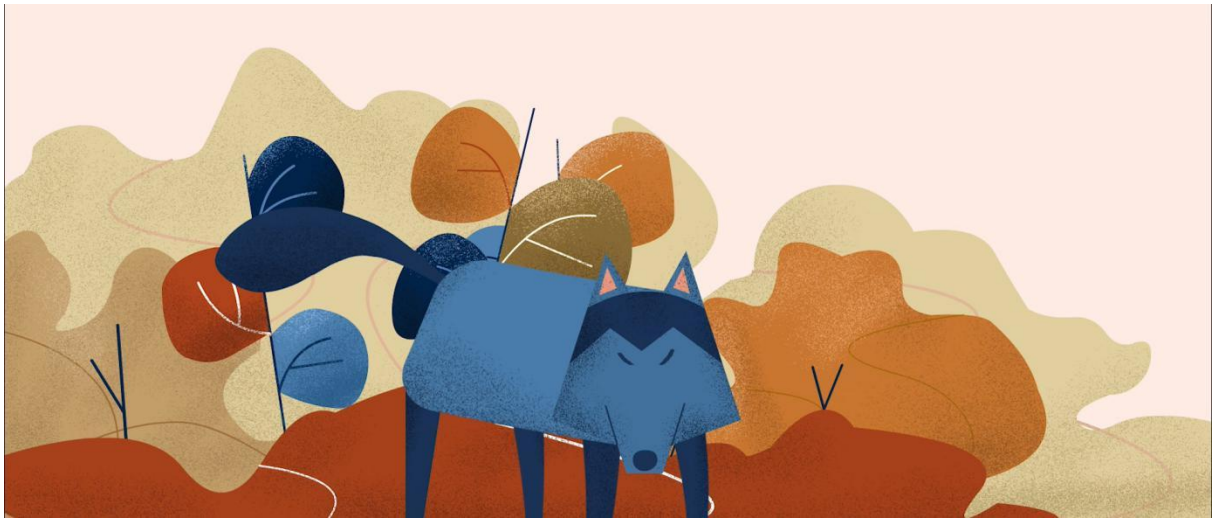
Categories and Items	Cost
Drawing Supplies	\$100
Software	
MAXON Cinema 4D (Student Version)	\$0
Adobe Creative Cloud (Student discount)	\$240
Sound	
Sound Effects	\$200
Composer's compensation	\$300
Promotion	
Festival fees	\$500
Air tickets	
Total	\$1340

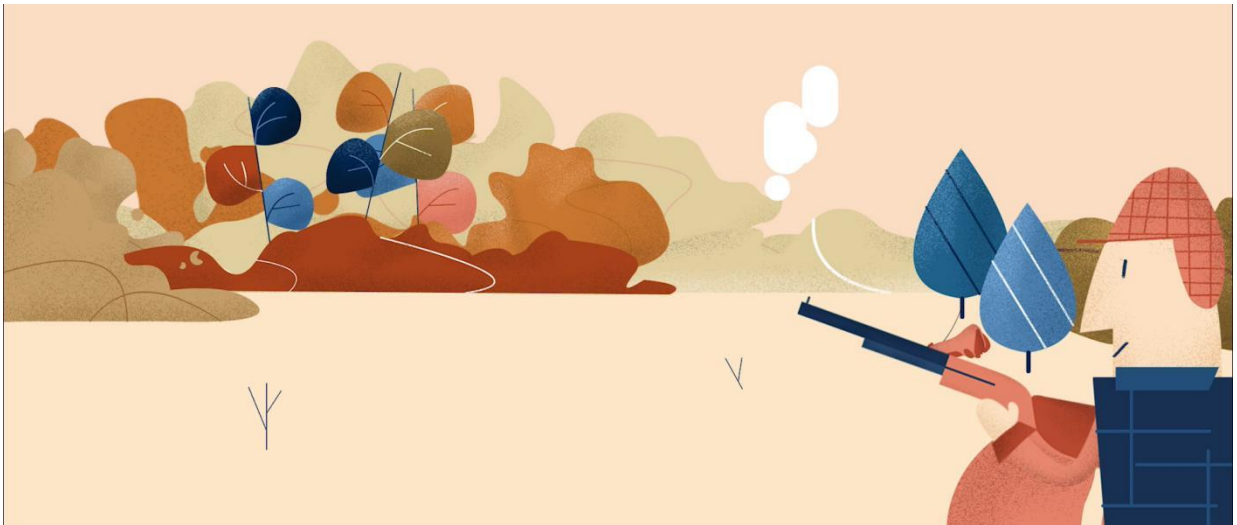
Timeline:

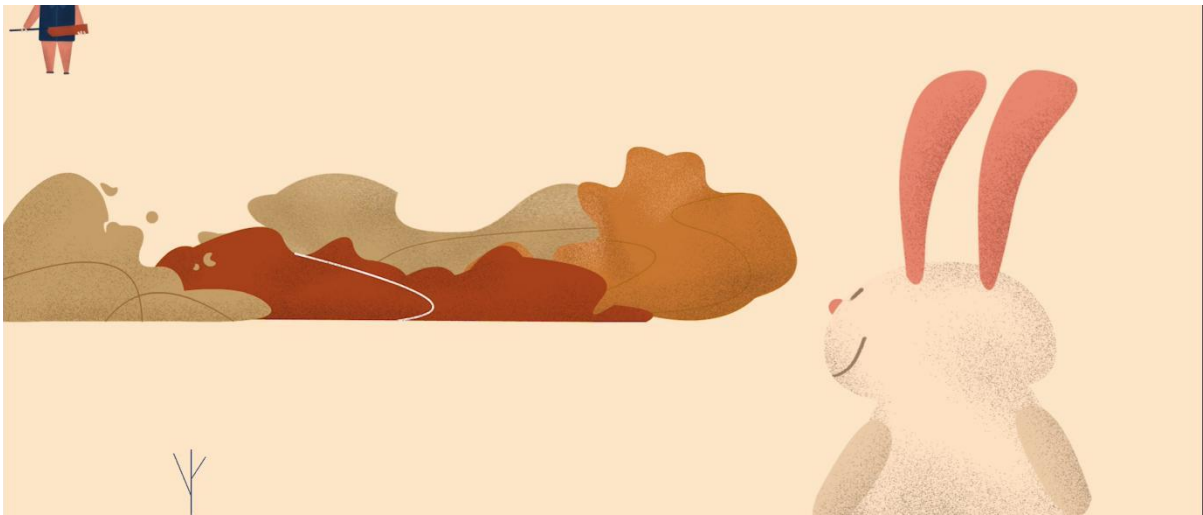
	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Treatment															
Development	Script														
	Character Designs														
	Environment Designs														
	Storyboard														
	Animatic														
	Keys(Rough)														
	Extremes(Rough)														
	Inbetweens(Rough)														
	Background														
	Clean up														
Production	Animation Color														
	Background Color														
	Special Effects														
	Background Music														
Sound Design	Sound Effects														
	Composite														
Post-production	Effects														
	Render														

APPENDIX II:
STILL IMAGES FROM BEHIND THE DOOR









A film by Pengxu Cheng