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evil I
BY
Jason Donati

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
March, 2000

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Date

Introduction

For the first time, my motivation in the creation of animation wasn't simply to fulfill a class assignment or get a job. Although these issues were still part of the equation, they were not the reason for spending countless hours hunched over and squinting at a computer monitor. I had reached a point with my previous film, "Head Quarters"(Donati, 1), where I no longer felt as if I had something to prove. I was secure with my skills as a computer animator, and could see beyond the technical aspects of my craft focusing more on a personal style and voice.

The desire to make "funny films" was no longer there. Something I desperately strove to accomplish with my past animations seemed trite at this point. It was time to produce something that evoked deeper emotions. I wanted the audience to relate to and be affected by the film beyond its running time. When the credits finally roll, I don't want the viewers to be thinking about the names on the screen.

The Story

If you don't like people looking over your shoulder, don't become a computer animator. Although I have come to accept the fact that I will almost always be working in an environment where people will constantly peek and peer at my unfinished work, it can be quite unnerving at times. I wouldn't feel comfortable walking up to some engineer's computer and just start staring at what is on his/her screen. However, in the world of art, people have no qualms about invading the minuscule amount of personal space you have in any production environment and telling you just what they think.

This is not to say I don't want people to see my work or that I don't care for other's opinions. I happen to feel the critique process is an invaluable part of filmmaking. However, there is a time and a place for everything.

What does this have to do with my film? Actually it has everything to do with it. People watching over my shoulder grew from a slight annoyance into a situation that hindered my productivity. At times I had to be quite rude to those who felt the need to give me a running commentary on every click of my mouse. In fact it had become such an issue that I began to think about it in a much wider scope.

The idea of surveillance, especially in the work place, was a concept I had not thought about much, but is something that is quite commonplace in today's society. Due to its hidden nature, it never seemed to bother me. That is to say until now.

After doing a little research on surveillance, I was shocked to find out just how prevalent it was and how much equipment there was to aid in the process. Entire stores, web-sites and catalogues are dedicated to selling and providing information for people who want to keep tabs on every move someone makes. Whether it's for security reasons, to enhance an employee's productivity, or for simple voyeurism, the fact that you may be watched at all times by a big-brother type can be very disturbing. More over, unless they recently changed the law books, it's very legal too.

I thought about how I would react if I were in a situation like that. Asked to perform at a job knowing that every muscle I moved was being watched, recorded, and cataloged. Wait. "How do I know I'm not being watched right now?" I am getting nervous just thinking about it.

"TRUE! --nervous --very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?"(Poe, 2) This is the opening line to the classic Edgar Allan Poe story "A Tell Tale Heart". It is a great example of the effects of surveillance upon an individual. After

rereading it for the first time since grade school, I realized this was the kind of statement I wanted to make. Poe's tale told of a man who had become so nervous and anxious due to an elder's "Evil Eye" that he felt forced to commit a horrendous murder. The story tells of a man who is brought to the brink of insanity. In thinking about the story I realized that it could very well be a commentary on today's work-place environment. I decided then and there to base my thesis film on the effects of surveillance on workers, with "A Tell Tale Heart" being the major source of inspiration. However, I did not want to just remake "A Tell Tale Heart" using animation. I wanted to capture its essence and overall mood, but develop a unique and original plot at the same time.

I concocted a lavish story, knowing half would be cut out anyway, about this computer-programmer type confined to his cubicle. He would be constantly under surveillance by wall mounted cameras which would help build a sense of nervousness and mental anguish in the main character, much like Poe did in his tale.

I developed a boss character, the villain, who would instill fear into the lowly worker and eventually push him to the edge. However, after much deliberation, I thought that this boss would be better represented as a robot with a camera-head rather than a humanoid. I

felt it would further increase the tension between technology and humanity.

The plot would consist of the lowly worker who, after hearing the boss-robot harm a fellow worker in the next cubicle, would try to deviate from his work for a moment and look to see what had happened. However, the wall-mounted cameras, which are more like servant slaves to the boss-robot, would catch the worker trying to peek over his cubicle wall and quickly notify the evil employer.

The heart of the film would then be a chase scene, between the robot-boss and the worker, through the halls of this bleak workspace. This would help to not only heighten the intensity of the animation but give the viewer a false sense of hope for the worker's freedom. However, in true horror film fashion, just when you think he might have escaped the clutches of the evil boss, the worker runs into a dead end. As the worker stands there out of breath and in disbelief of the wall in front of him, another wall-mounted camera comes from out of nowhere to let him know he is still being watched.

The boss-robot, quickly catching up to the cornered worker, opens it's portal out of which comes an ominous looking claw. The sight of this claw forces the worker to back up into the corner and cringe knowing he is about to pay for the attempt to leave the confines of his

cubicle. The claw starts to open and close as it begins to approach the worker. It quickly fills the screen and the viewer is left with only a single gasp from the worker.

The film concludes by bringing the viewer back into the cubicle from which it started. You can see the main character, from the neck down, at his desk typing away as he was before his horrible encounter with his employer. However, the film goes on to reveal that his head has been replaced with a surveillance camera. The watched has become the watcher.

The Style

Until now, every film I have produced has been a search for my personal style. Previously, my main goal was to make the animation, sets, and lighting look as real as possible. However, after I finished “Head Quarters” everything had changed. I was finally able to create a film that most people would, at first glance, perceive as a live-action film or photographs. This being true, I no longer felt the need to prove my technical ability as an animator in mimicking reality. I could develop a style that I felt best represented the visions I had in my head.

Although the pressure was lifted from making another photo-realistic animation, I would not stray too far from its origins. Much like I

used "A Tell Tale Heart" to inspire my story line, photo-realism would serve as a stepping stone to reach the next stage of my personal style.

After thinking about the overall theme and mood of my story as well as my strengths as an animator, I began to create a style that I would later refer to as enhanced-reality or e-realism. This concept was born when I began to sketch Burton Price, the main character in my thesis.

When I first imagined this character, I knew there were some very important traits I wanted him to have. For instance, I felt Burton should be slightly nerdy, and a little bit off kilter. Nevertheless, I didn't want to go overboard with it. I wanted to develop him in a way that would enhance his traits and not necessarily exaggerate them as most "cartoons" do.

To achieve this look, I first made the head of Burton Price as real as I could possibly make it. From there, I began making adjustments in accordance with his personality traits. Wanting him to be "a little off kilter", I began to enhance his asymmetrical qualities. For instance, I made his head slightly bigger on one side. These adjustments helped to create a unique character without becoming a caricature, that is the basis of enhanced reality.

I designed the robot-boss in almost the identical way. However, since robots do not have a set look or construction, I had a little more freedom with the concept. Nevertheless I began with a sketch that could have easily been mistaken for a traditional robot. From there I made some modifications to enhance the qualities I felt this character should display. For instance I changed the robot from a box-like shape giving it a more tapered look. I did this for two reasons. I wanted to give the boss a more sleek and aerodynamic design, enhancing its sense of speed and mobility. The second more interesting reason is that I wanted its shadow or silhouette to be reminiscent of a man's necktie.

This concept was not used solely for the characters in my film. It made its way into all of my aesthetic choices. The set of my movie was also heavily influenced by e-reality. The walls of a typical office space are usually gray and uninteresting. I enhanced that situation by making them absolutely void of any texture or three-dimensional qualities. No electrical outlets, random posters or signs were included, thus helping to magnify the stark mood of the environment.

To further strengthen the film's overall mood I chose to use a very muted color palate. Although most office spaces are pretty much void of color in the first place, I wanted give the film an almost black and white feel. I used occasional splashes of color to bring out the portions of

characters or objects I felt needed special attention. In fact it's not until the only truly black and white shot in the entire movie appears, that one really notices the contrast. Once again, this was all an attempt to enhance the reality of the environment and help bring the qualities of the workspace I wanted to emphasize to the foreground.

The Animation

One aspect of this film that I wanted to repeat from "Head Quarters", was realistic motion and animation. I am a strong believer that unless the characters act and react in a realistic fashion your viewers will not relate with or get emotionally attached to them. Without this viewer involvement you have little chance to involve them in a dramatic or tragic story.

With this being said, I painstakingly made it a point to develop many different facial expressions for the main character, Burton Price. If I were to have any hope of making the viewer think that Burton was alive and breathing, I had to include the smallest of details while animating him. Many persons design their characters to blink, I chose to make my character's nostrils flare. This small detail doesn't add directly to the story, but tiny details like this when added to an animation, can

make the difference between a character that is in motion and a character that is alive.

I approached the evil robot-boss a little differently as far as the animation was concerned. Unlike Burton, who had a very distinct personality, I wanted to create a unique blend of human and robotic characteristics. For instance I limited the robot to very sharp and precise movements, which were counterbalanced with its humanistic reactions and timing. A good example of this balance occurs when Burton begins the chase scene by running away from the robot. The evil boss, startled for a brief moment, must first assess the situation before reacting to what has transpired. The split second delay I added before the robot takes off makes the boss seem more human than machine. To further strengthen the character's dual robotic and humanistic qualities, a second moment of pause was added. As the chase scene reaches its climax the robot unexpectedly stops. Although it is brief, this pause not only imitates the human thought process but foreshadows the end of the chase.

This combination of traits truly personifies the role surveillance plays in today's workplace. Technology is the vehicle by which humans are able to be watched at all times. It is this partially anthropomorphic

character of the robot-boss, which defends the philosophy behind the animation of his character.

Cinematography and Editing

The virtual camera played a big role in this film, both literally and figuratively. From its conception, I realized that the film's cinematography could be a tool to strengthen the needed sense of tension and drama. The camera angles, shot durations and composition were as important as the animation itself.

As the film progresses so does the tension. To enhance this, the shots become shorter and shorter. This is an attempt to imitate a person's ability to take in more information about the surrounding's while under extreme stress or pressure. This frantic style also gives the viewer a sense of uneasiness to foreshadow an upcoming drastic event.

Extreme camera angles were used throughout the animation to magnify the psychological struggle that Burton Price is encountering. From the film's opening extreme close-up shot of Burton's eye to the track and zoom effect borrowed from Alfred Hitchcock used at the climax, the camera played an active role in setting the tone. It is the hand-held camera look during the chase scene that serves as a pivotal point for Burton's character. For one moment both are free. The camera

is free from its tripod and Burton is free from his cubicle. However, the virtual camera is quickly returned to its tripod foreshadowing Burton's inevitable return to confinement.

In this film as in most animations the majority of the editing is done in the storyboard phase rather than in post-production, as in live-action movies. I wanted to combine all the elements in a cohesive manner, and at the same time, strengthen the mood of the film.

I approached the editing process with a minimalist attitude. For example, I shied away from any camera fades or dissolves, and relied solely on the cut. Through the simplicity of the edits, I hoped to not only reflect and emphasize the workplace environment but give the film a strong sense of emotion. In this case, less was more.

Conclusion

From the onset of the project I often questioned whether I had bitten off more than I could chew. I had achieved some success with the cute, photo-realistic, funny films that preceded it and could have easily made just one more. However, I chose to take the road less traveled, at least by me, and produced a much darker film that comments upon today's society.

Although it is difficult to remove yourself from a process with which you have become so familiar and proficient, it is absolutely necessary if you want to grow both as an animator and a storyteller. Discovery of a personal style evolves when one is able to make decisions based on what they want to do rather than what they're good at doing. I can honestly say I was able to do this. Whether or not it is a successful film in the eyes of others, I have much about the art of filmmaking, and most important, much about myself in this process.

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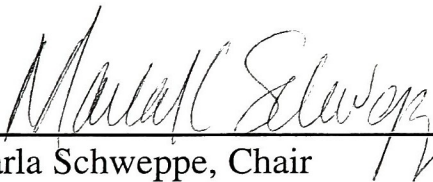
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Original Thesis Proposal

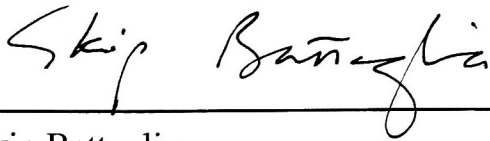
Proposal for an MFA Thesis Project

EVIL I
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Jason Donati

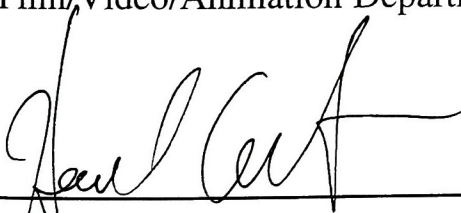
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Jason Donati
011-66-2782
4/16/1999

“Evil I”

The animation opens with a close shot of a computer screen. The “beep-beep” of the blinking cursor grows louder. Beads of sweat are dripping down someone’s forehead. The camera pulls out to reveal a middle-aged man, inside his cramped office cubicle, apprehensively pushing the keys of his computer’s keyboard. He peeks his head from behind the monitor as the cursor’s “beep-beep” becomes increasingly louder and heartbeat-like. It cuts to a close shot of a surveillance camera hanging from the ceiling. Its little red light is blinking in time with the, now extremely loud, heartbeat sound. The man begins to sweat even more as the walls of his cubicle start to close in on him. The camera, which is on a track, lowers down and gets right into the office worker’s face. He gets up and slides out of his cubicle as the camera follows his every move. The heartbeat becomes more rapid as he stands in the hallway face to face with the blinking camera.

The office worker fakes to the left then sprints down the empty hallway to the right. The camera, fooled only for a second, heads down the hall after him but it can not keep up. The worker turns the corner at the end of the hall. The camera looks in all directions when it finally reaches the end of the hall, not sure which way the man went. It cuts to the office worker, looking over his shoulder, as he runs down a long hallway. The sound of the heartbeat, although distant now, is still beating. The worker stops running as he reaches a dead-end. There is only an ominous door in front of him which reads “Mr. CEO”. Breathing heavily, the worker checks over his shoulder once more then reaches for the door handle. It cuts to the inside of a dimly lit room. The light from an opening door illuminates the hardwood flooring. The office worker’s head peaks in from behind the door. It cuts to the rear of the dim room where a bald man, facing the opposite direction, sits at a desk staring at a lone television monitor. The worker’s eyes open wide as the sound of the heartbeat is getting louder once again. It cuts back to an over-the-shoulder view of the bald man at his desk. On the monitor is the black and white view of the surveillance camera racing down the hall. The office worker comes into view standing outside the bald man’s door. The heartbeat is extremely loud as it’s once again face to face with the worker. The bald Mr. CEO, seeing the face of the worker in his monitor, turns around in his chair and quickly stands up. The office worker turns around and sees the face of his boss. He has one eye that is huge and grotesque. The worker charges at him. The heartbeat becomes almost deafening as he clenches his fist and knocks Mr. CEO out cold on the hardwood floor. However, the heartbeat sound still persists. He grabs the television monitor off his desk, ripping the cords out from the wall and lifts it over his head. He then closes his eyes and drops it on the head of the unconscious Mr. CEO. The heartbeat stops! The surveillance camera, outside the doorway, falls limp as it’s little red light stops blinking as well.

The worker slowly walks out of the room, closing the door behind him. He glances once more at the dead camera as he idly walks down the long hallway. With a sigh of relief, the office worker loosens

his neck-tie and walks around the first corner. He gets two or three steps then, “THUMP-THUMP”, “THUMP-THUMP”. The worker stops dead in his tracks. The heartbeat sound is back! The lights begin to pulse with beat. He turns back and peeks around the corner down the hallway. The camera is gone! The sound is getting louder again. He darts down the hallway toward the door. It cuts to the inside of Mr. CEO’s office. The door is flung open. The worker looks in the room he just left. Mr. CEO’s body is gone! The walls of the room begin to bulge, pulsing with heartbeat. The television monitor is back on the desk and the worker’s face is on the screen. The heartbeat is getting louder and louder. The worker walks toward the desk and sits down in front of the monitor. It cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot of the worker. His face fills the monitor. His hand reaches out to turn the power off. His face on the television becomes extremely frightened as he waves his hands at the finger about to turn off the power. The worker pushes the button and the screen goes black as the worker in the monitor screams. The heartbeat is stopped! The camera slowly pulls out as the worker turns around in the chair. One of his eyes has become huge and grotesque. The worker has become the boss!

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4/16/1999

**Budget Proposal
for
“Evil I”**

| <u>Task</u> | <u>Projected</u> | <u>In-Kind</u> | <u>Actual</u> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Storyboard - 20 @ \$20/hr | \$400.00 | \$380.00 | \$20.00 |
| Modeling - 150 @ \$20/hr | \$3,000.00 | \$3,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Animation - 250 @ \$20/hr | \$5,000.00 | \$5,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Texture Design - 80 @ \$20/hr | \$1,600.00 | \$1,600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Soundtrack - 20 @ 50/hr | \$1,000.00 | \$975.00 | \$25.00 |
| Computer Time - 1000 @ \$100/hr | \$100,000.00 | \$100,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Editing Time - 40 @ \$250/hr | \$10,000.00 | \$10,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Rendering Time - 525 @ \$25/hr | \$13,125.00 | \$13,125.00 | \$0.00 |
| Storage Media - 2 @ \$100/per | \$200.00 | \$200.00 | \$0.00 |
| - 10 @ \$2/per | \$20.00 | \$0.00 | \$20.00 |
| Video Tapes - 15 @ \$8/per | \$120.00 | \$0.00 | \$120 |
| TOTALS | \$134,465.00 | \$134,280.00 | \$185 |

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4/16/1999

“Evil I” Timeline

Summer Quarter 1999 1 Credit

Modeling of all sets
Create texture maps
Modeling of Characters with some rough motion tests
Begin Lighting tests

Fall Quarter 1999 4 Credits

Finish Lighting all sets and characters
Finish all leftover modeling (sets/chartacter)
Begin animating
Rendering tests of animated scenes

Winter Quarter 1999 4 Credits

Animate, Animate, Animate
Render scenes as finished
Begin Recording Sound
Begin Editing on Avids

Spring Quarter 2000 3 Credits

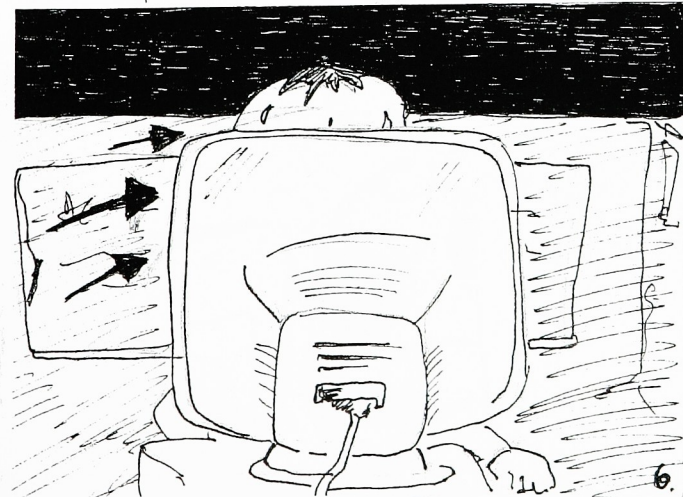
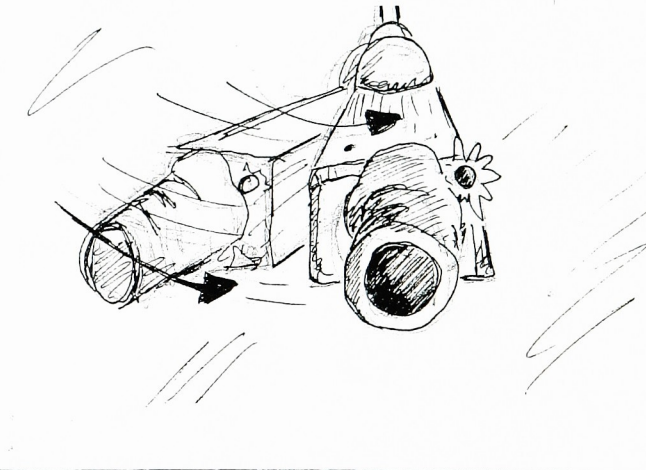
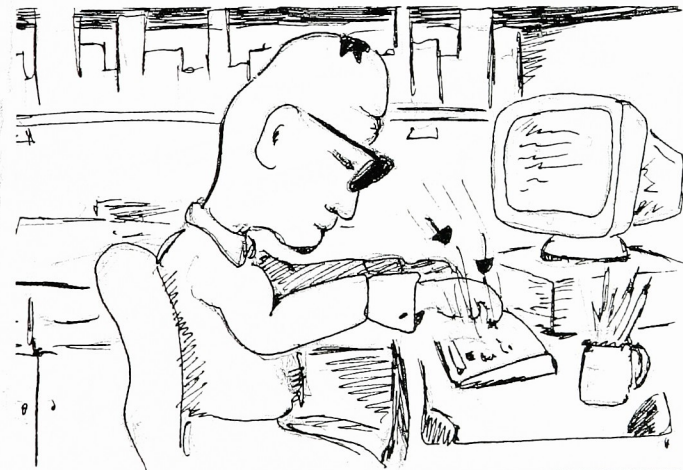
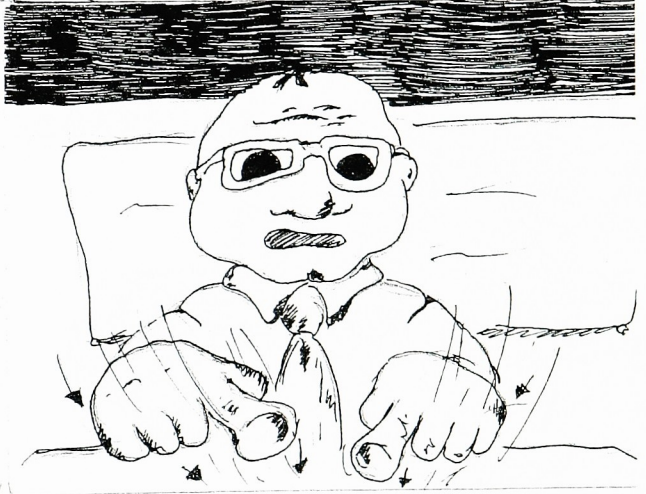
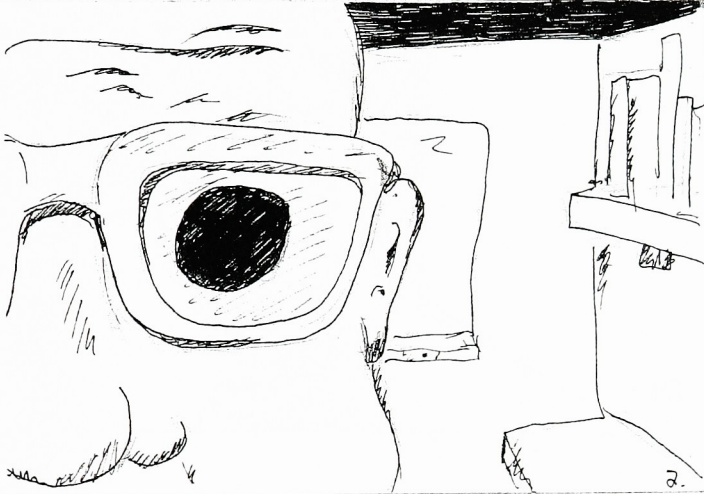
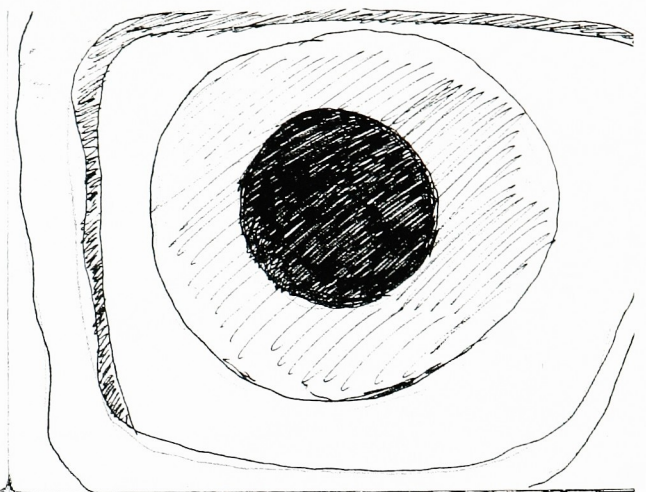
Animate last shots
Finishing Rendering
Finish Sound
Finish Editing
Public Screening @ end of quarter

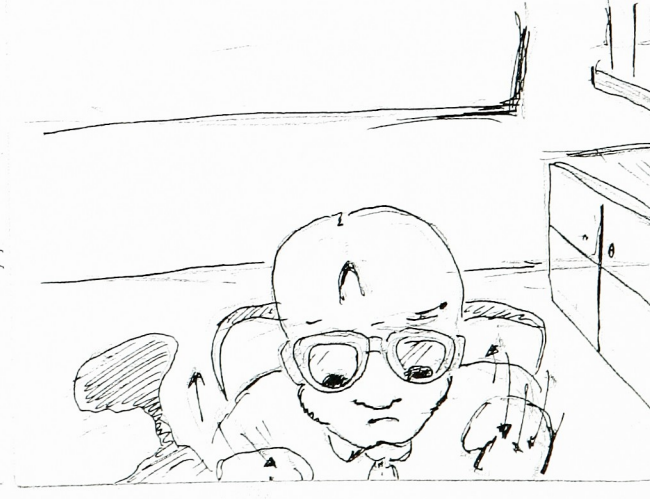
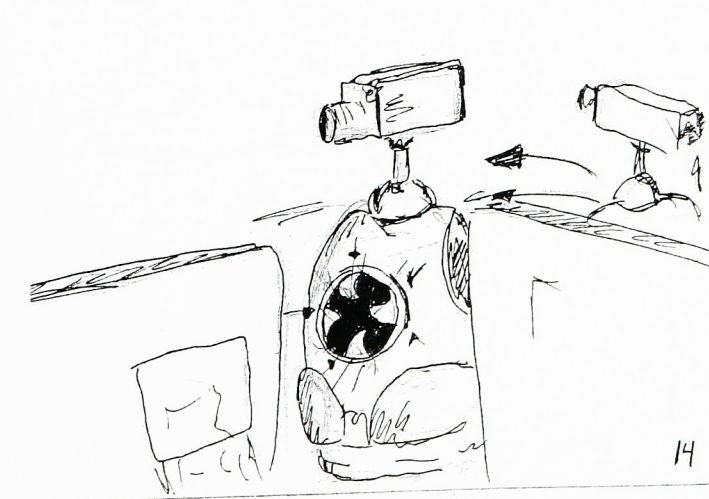
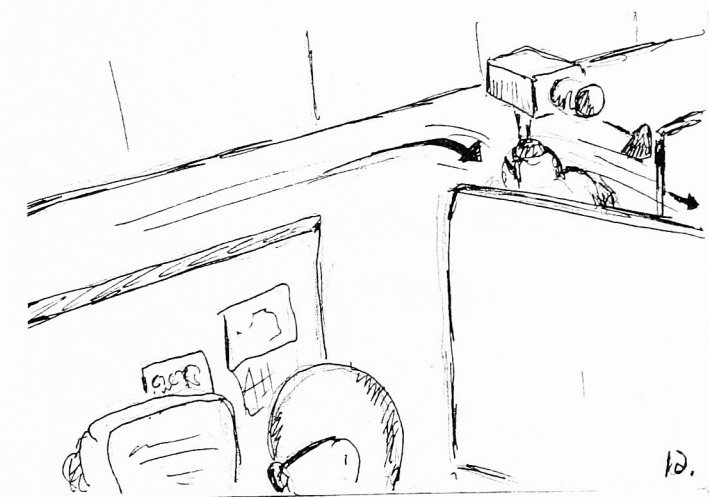
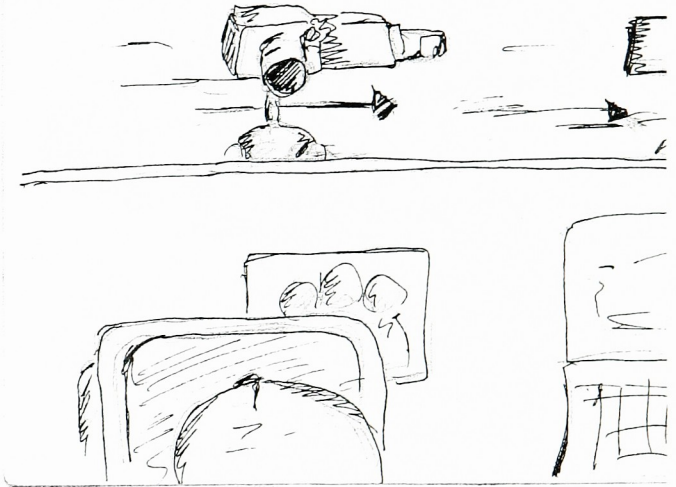
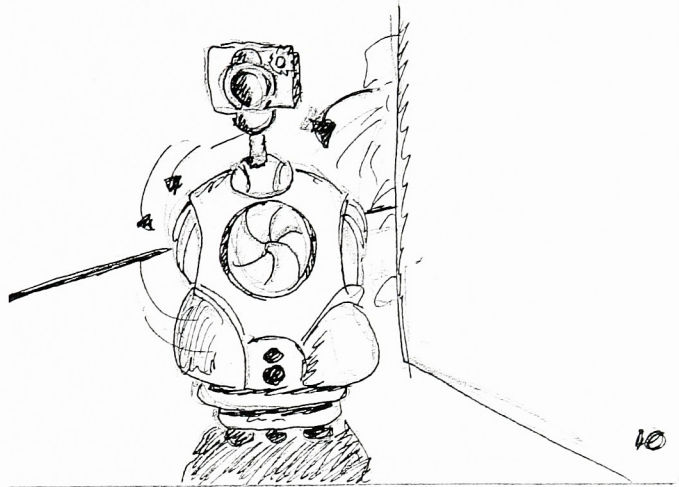
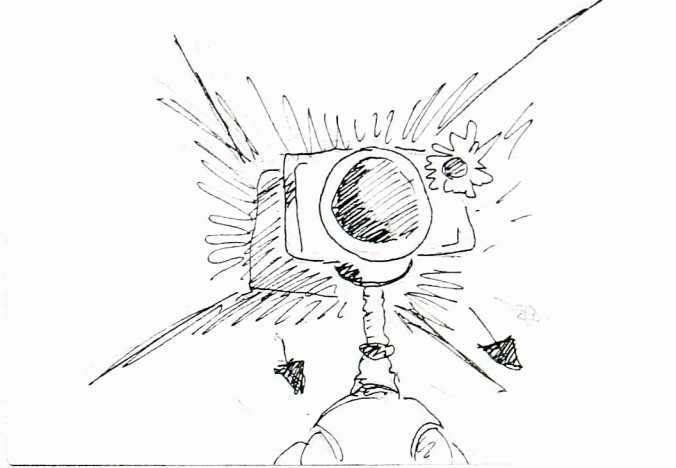
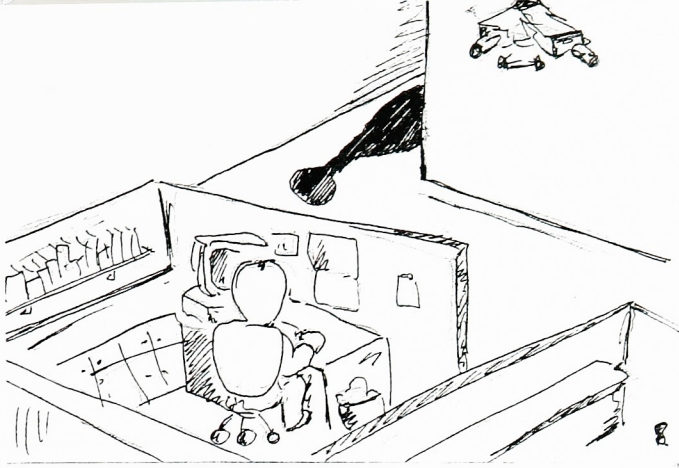
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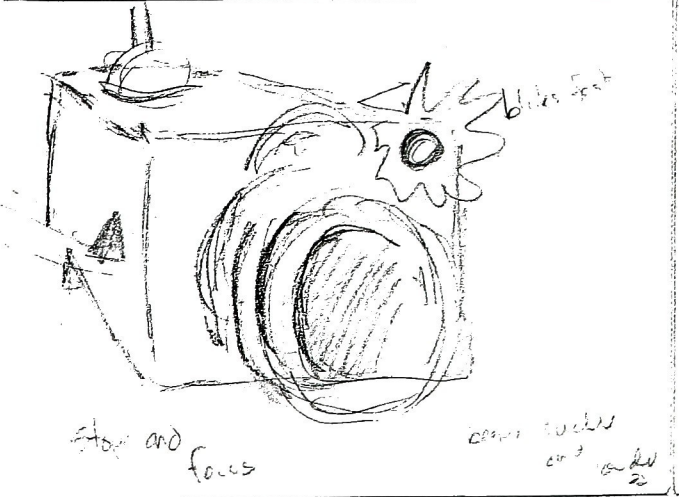
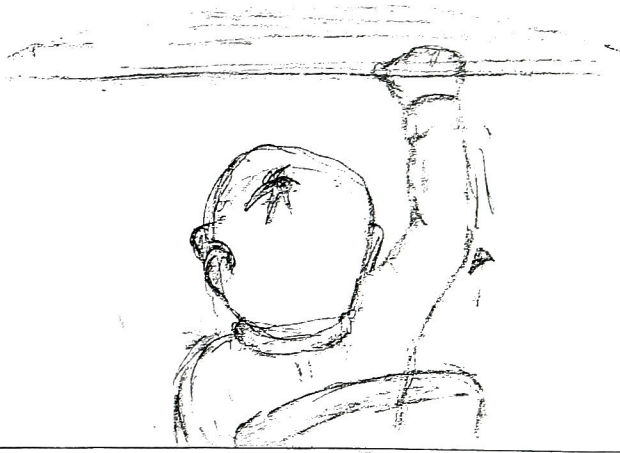
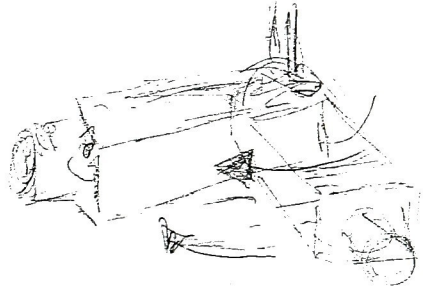
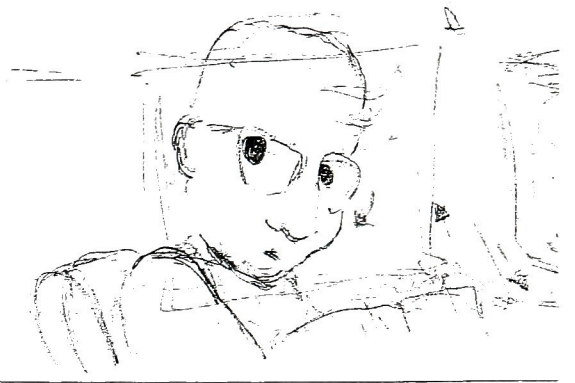
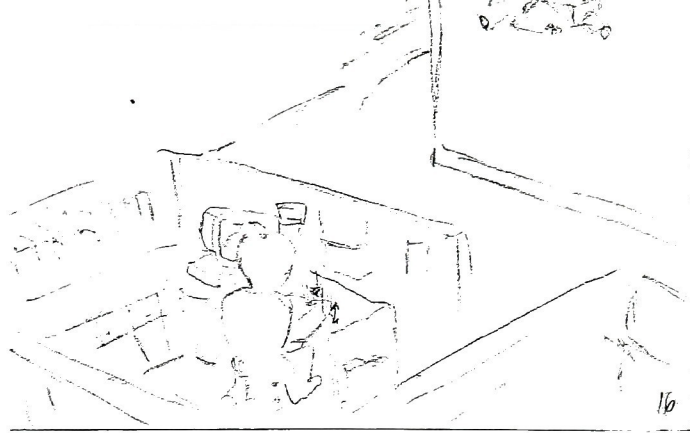
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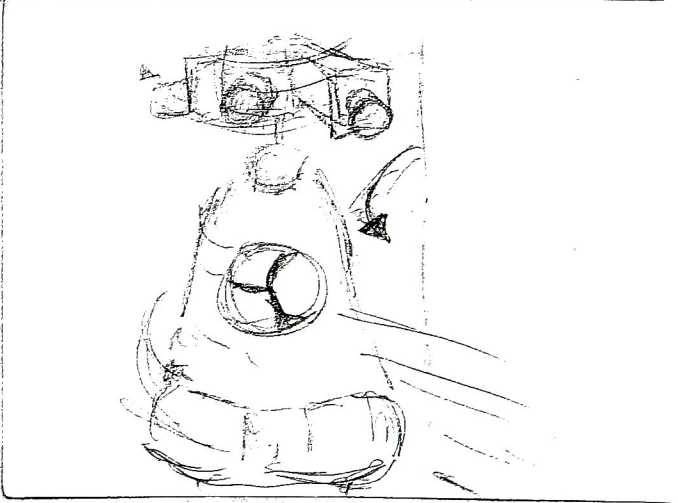
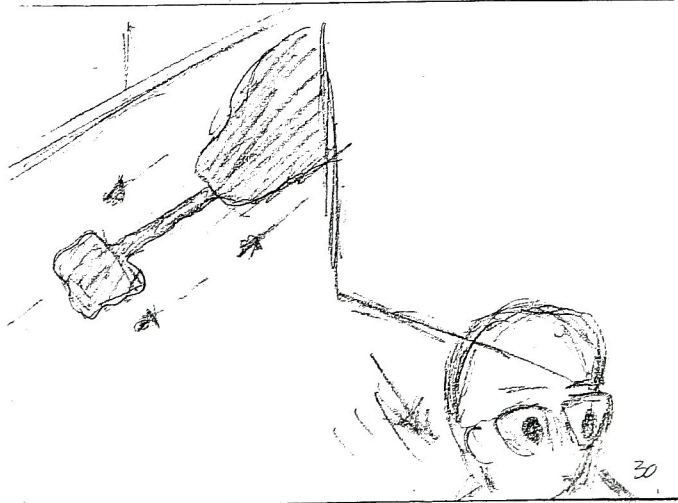
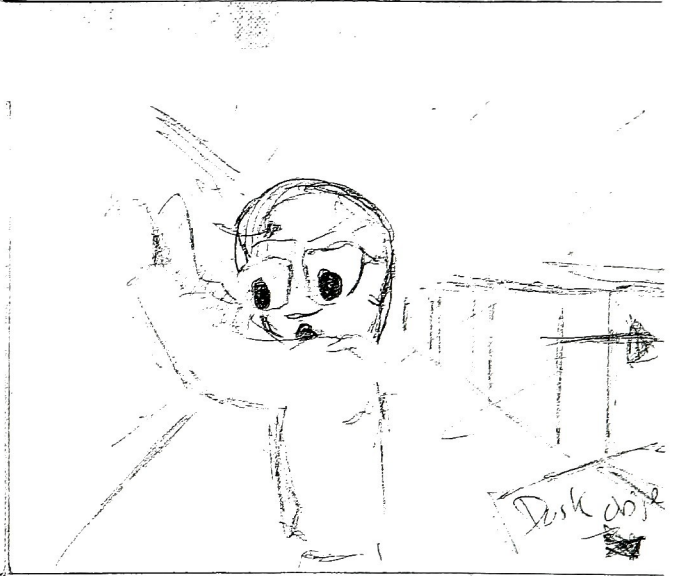
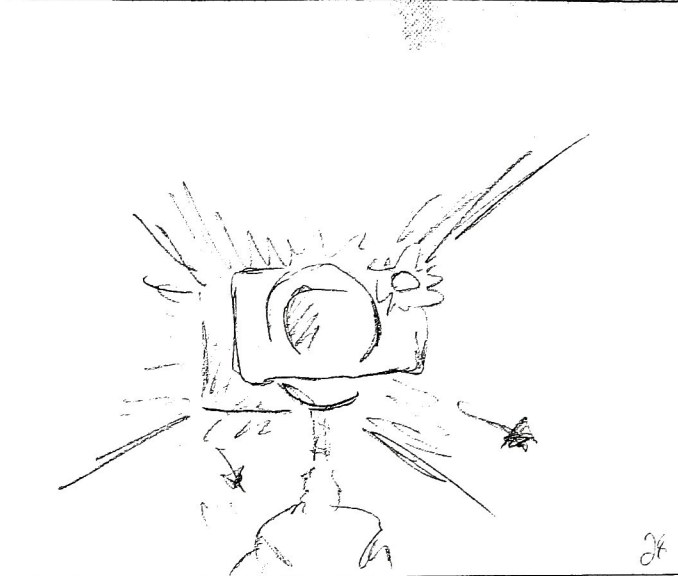
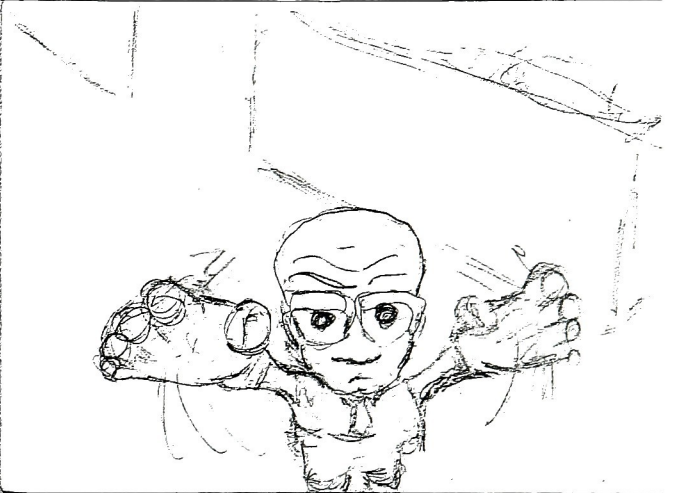
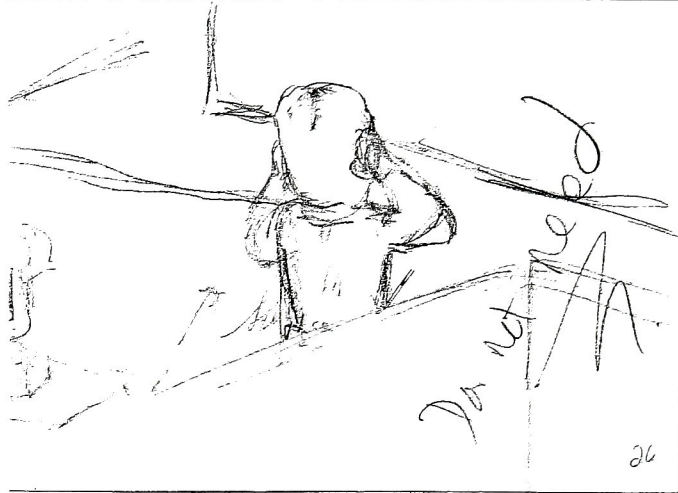
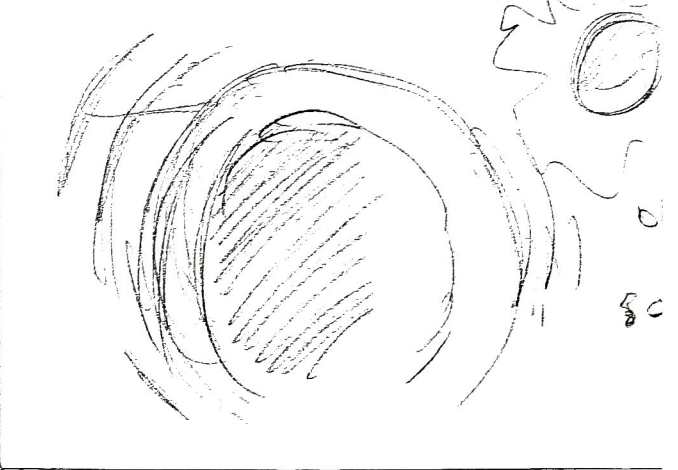
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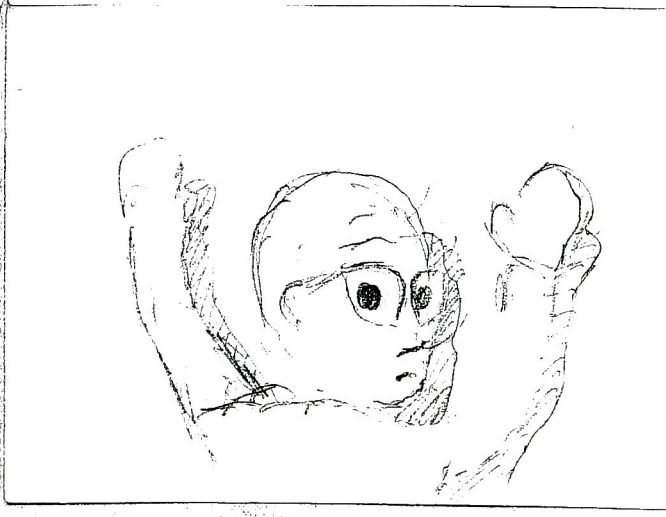
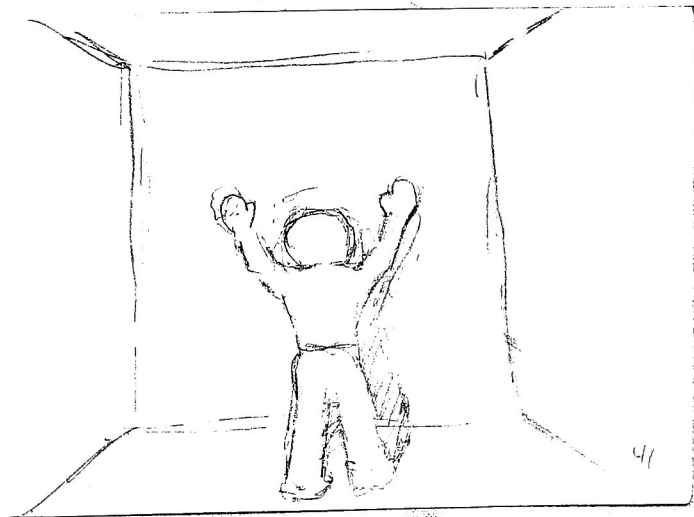
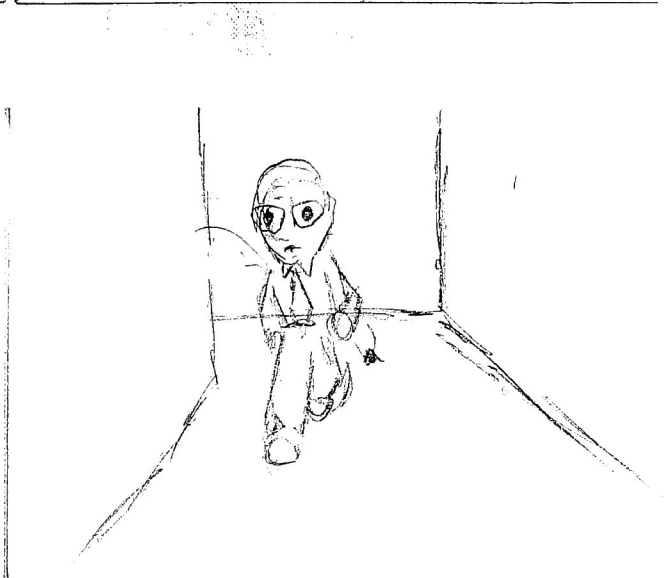
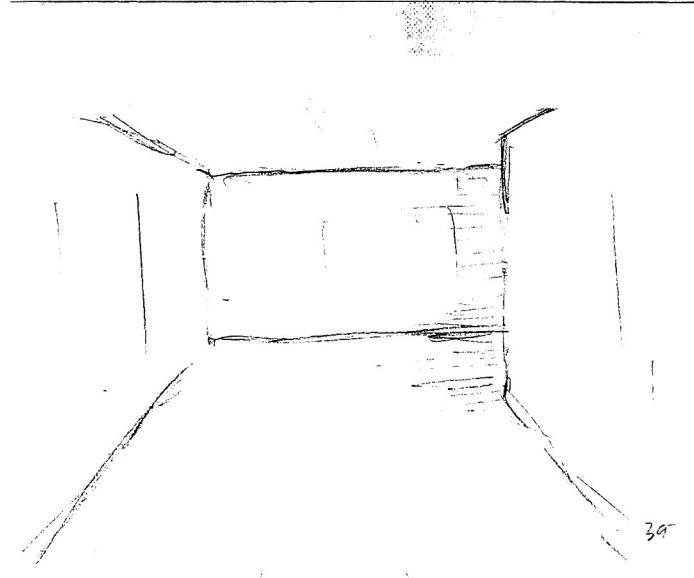
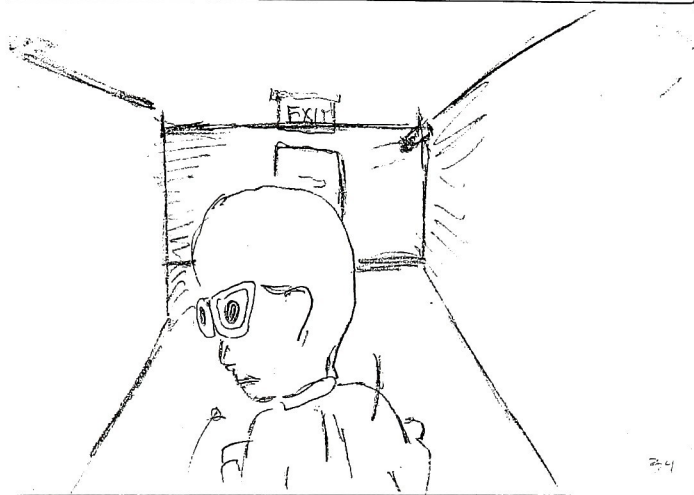
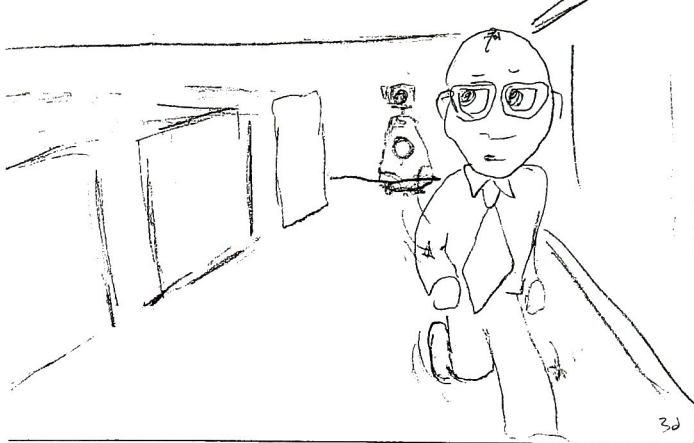
by
Jason Donati





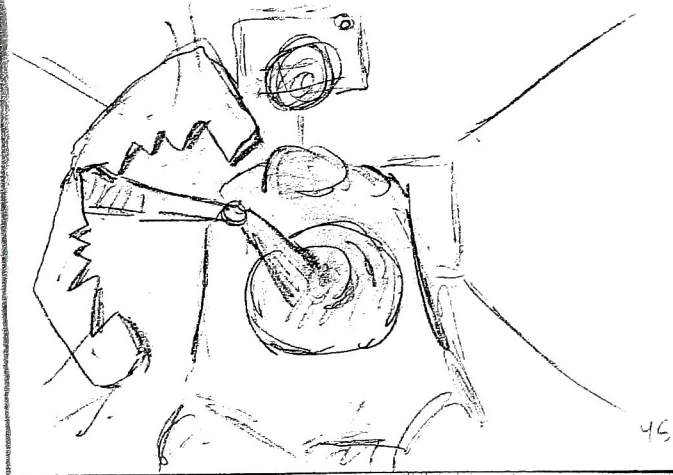




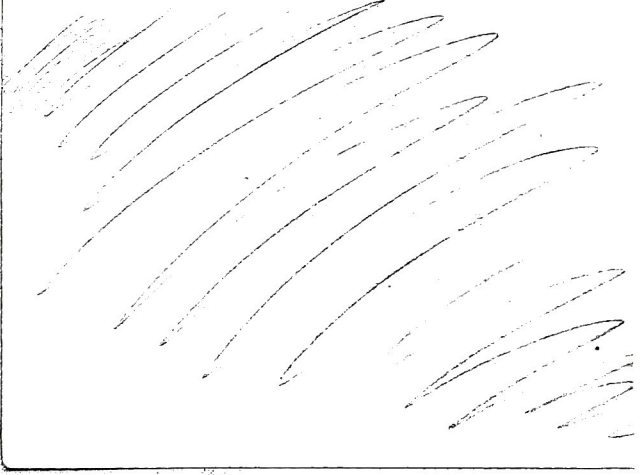




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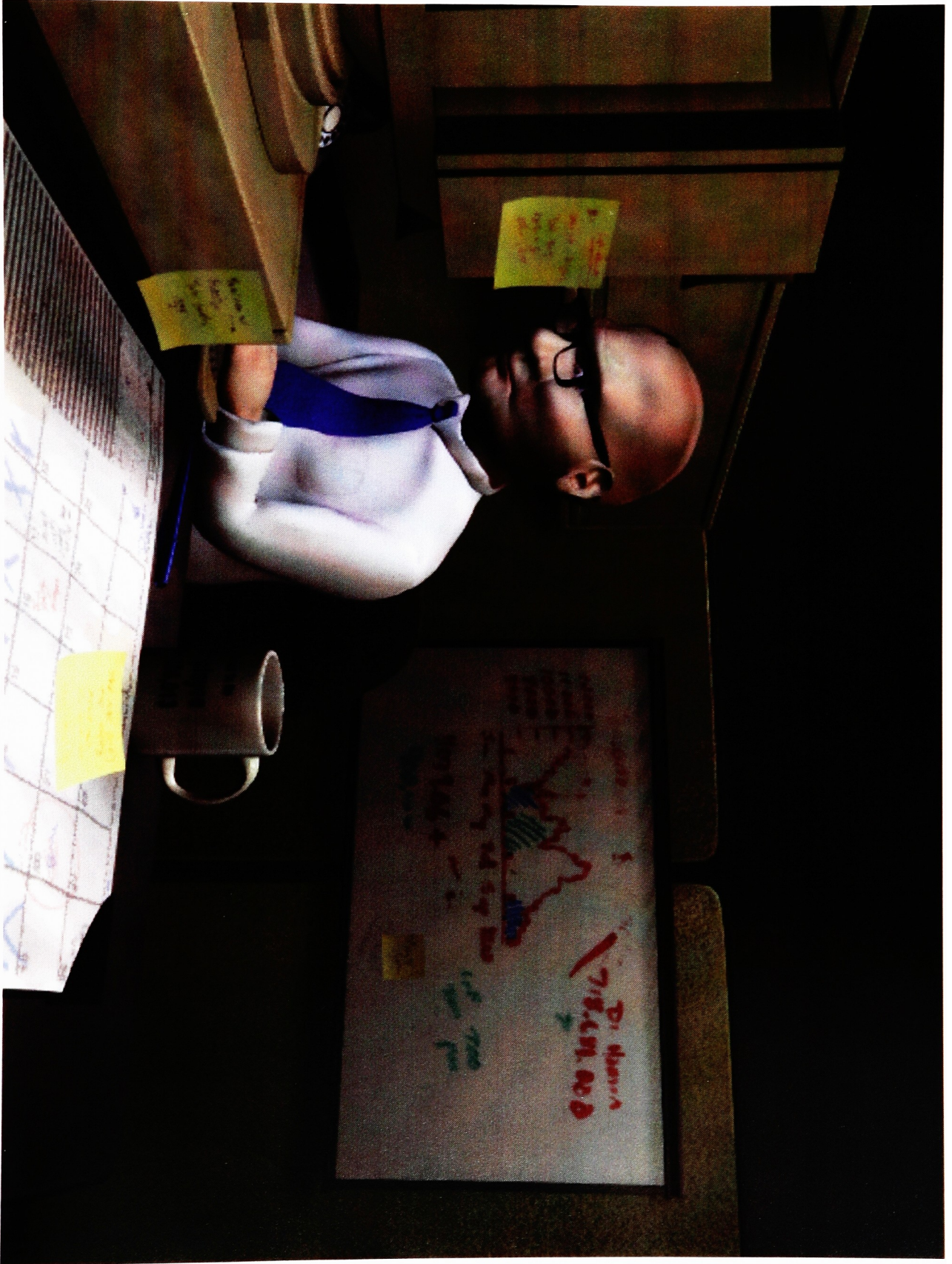


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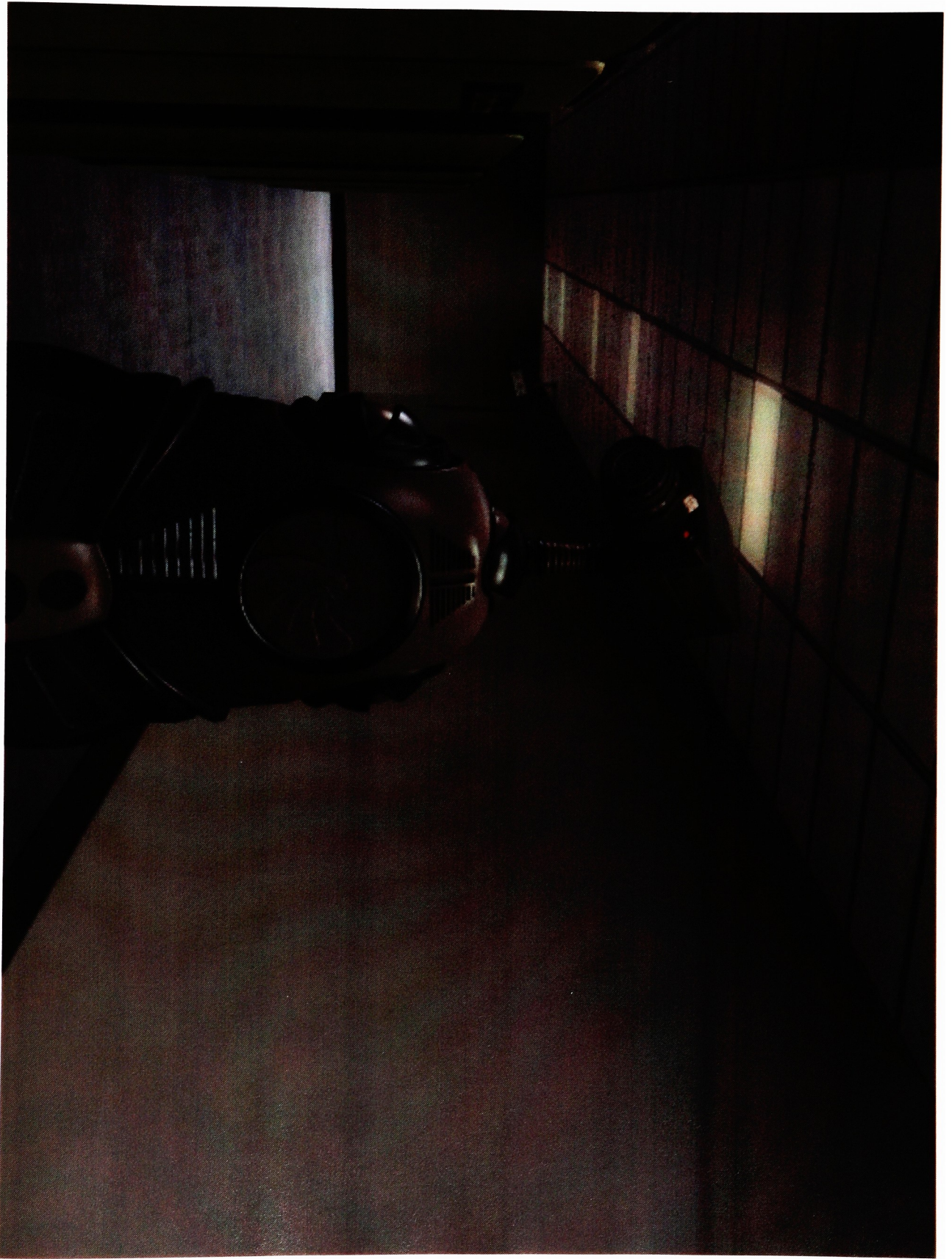


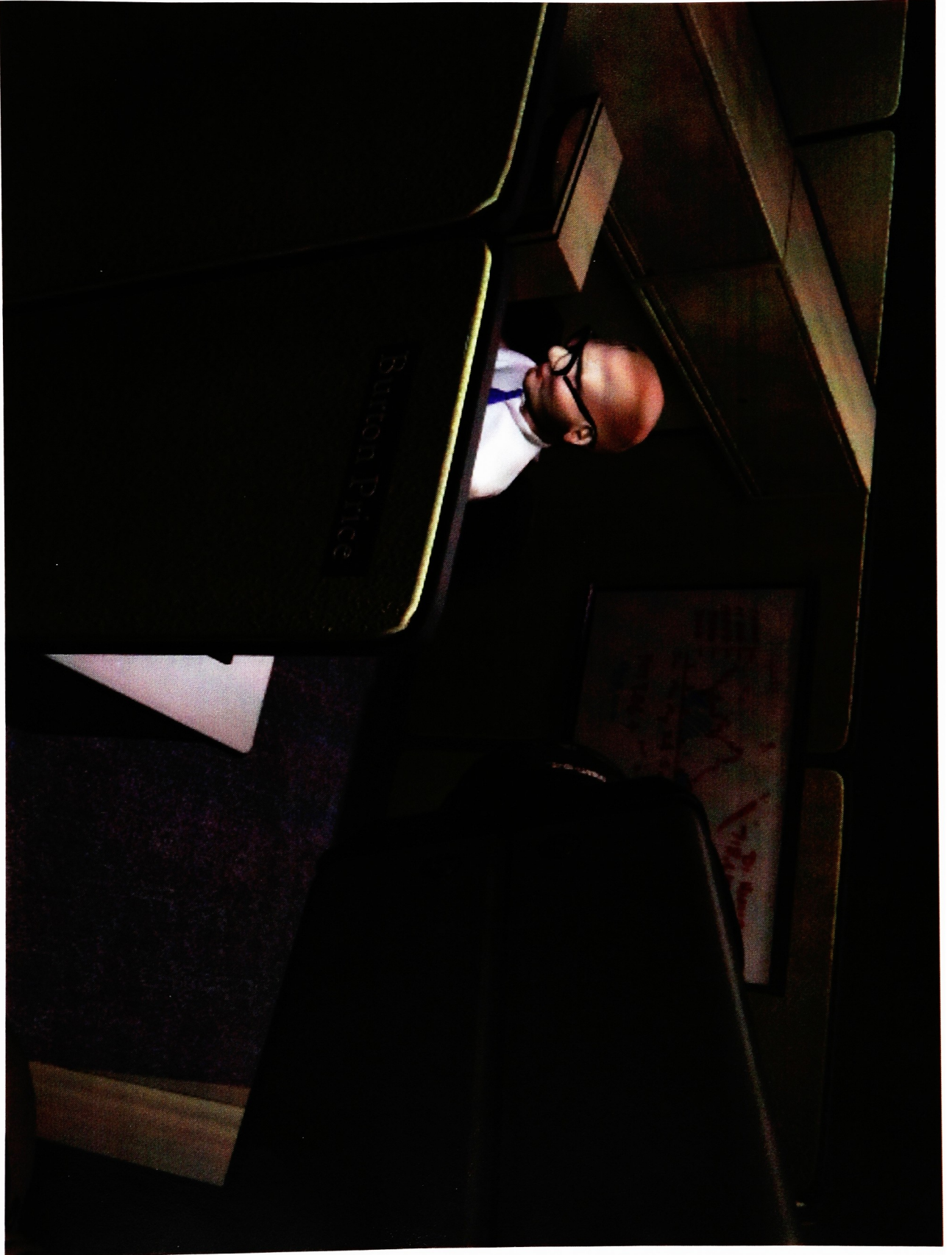
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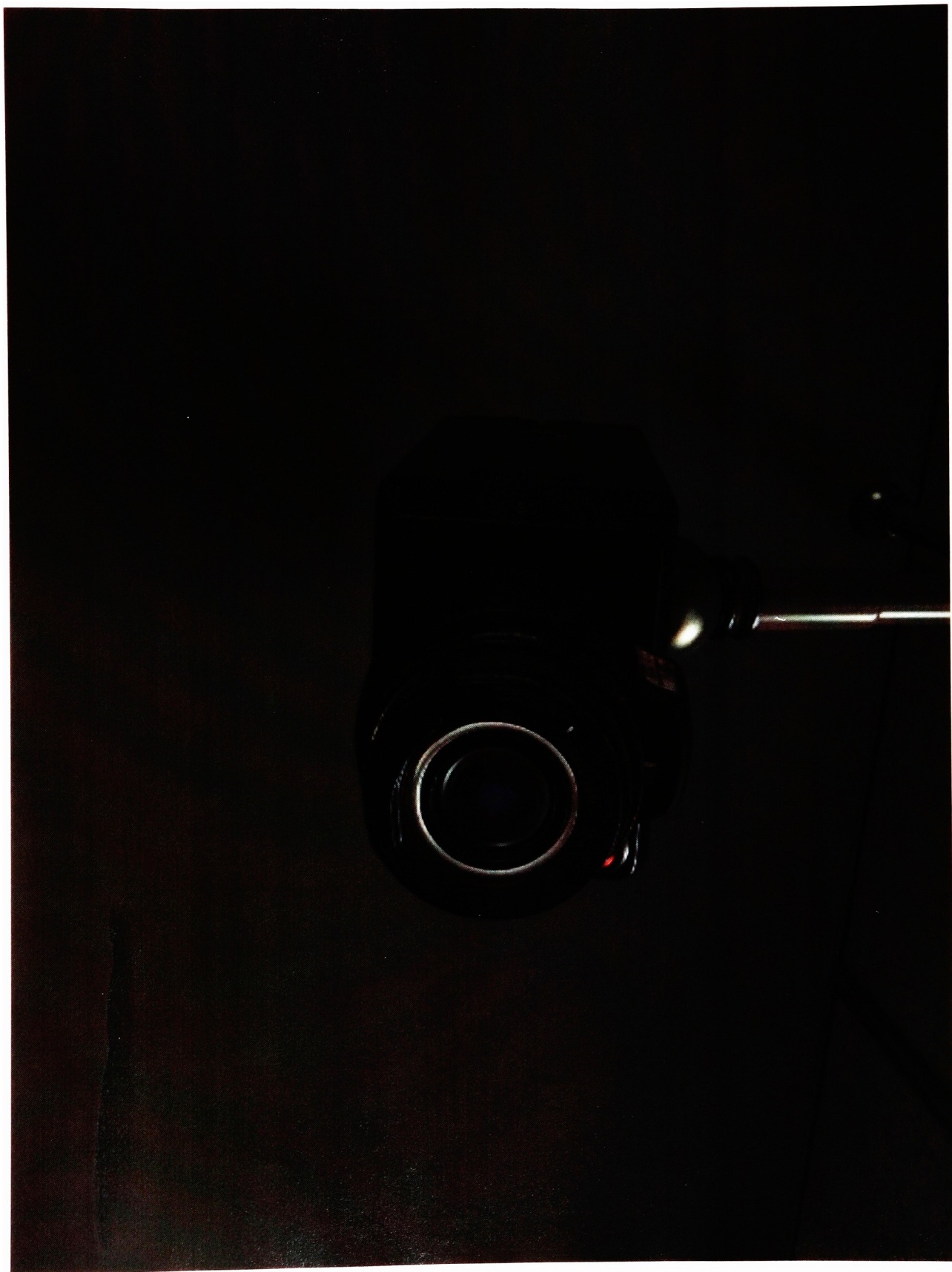
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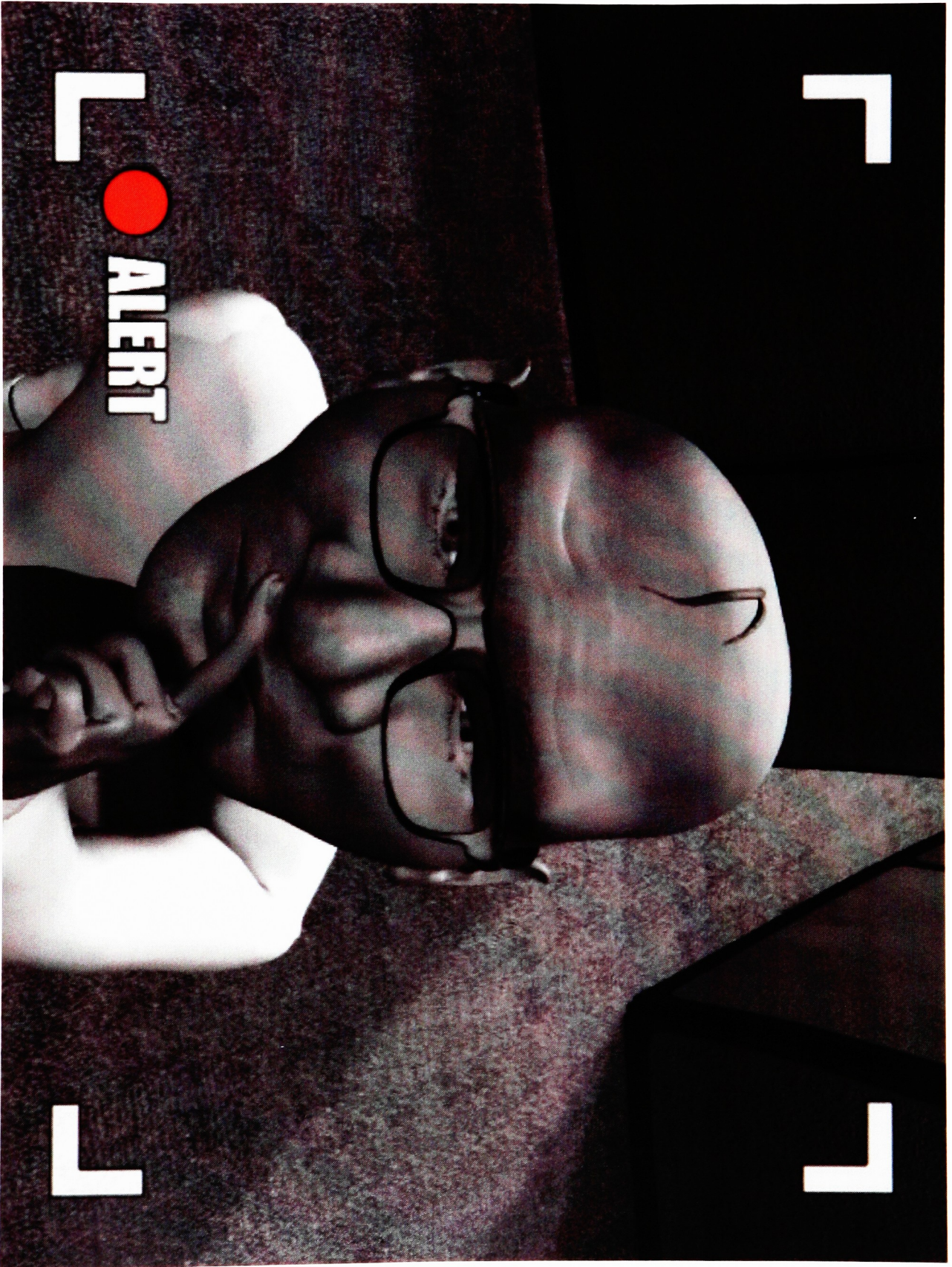












● ALERT

