

12-1-2015

# Open Up

Mahima Tuladhar

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# Open Up

By

Mahima Tuladhar

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
IMAGING ARTS/COMPUTER ANIMATION  
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION  
COLLEGE OF IMAGING ARTS AND SCIENCES

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK  
DECEMBER, 2015

Committee Approval

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Charles Bandla

Date

Professor, Animation Program Chair

School of Film and Animation

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Peter Kiwitt

Date

Assistant Professor

School of Film and Animation

---

Luvon Sheppard

Date

Professor,  
School of Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

Open up is a graduate 2D animation thesis with a run time of 6 minutes and 27 seconds. It explores the strained relationship between a boy and his father. In amidst of a fight between the two the boy runs out of the house following a light wisp. It leads him to a cliff where a woman in a black cloak stands. She gives the boy a very magical experience and a reminder of the love he once had with his family. He goes back home where he reminds his father about the love they once had and that they still have each other. The father realizes that even though his wife has passed that his son is still there and needs him and his love

My main intentions with the production were to demonstrate my skills in background design, animation, compositing and editing. Through out the process of this project I quickly realize that there were some areas that I am stronger in than others. However, as with many art forms there is always room for improvement and growth, which I intend on pursuing in my career afterwards.

This is a 2D animation film using the software TVPaint, AfterEffects, and PhotoShop. The sound design was edited on Adobe Premier. Lucas Bernal produced the music.

This thesis paper will discuss the process of the film. Starting from the development of the story, the production process, and the postproduction process. Along with that any issues, critiques, and reflections.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

During the production of my project there were many people that aided me along the way. Whether it was getting feedback, helping physically with the film, or just providing support and encouragement I am thankful for all of them.

My thesis advisor Charles Bandla played a crucial role with the films process. He guided me especially in the story telling process. His experience and knowledge in animation gave a lot of insightful critiques. My other committee member Peter Kiwitt and Luvon Sheppard also provided constructive feedback in their area of expertise.

Lucas Bernal, who is the composer of my film, was able to produce beautiful touching music for my film in a very short period. He was efficient and very professional. Although he lives in Colombia he got in touch via Skype to make sure I liked the direction that he was going in with the music. Also, he gave an amazing musical experience to compliment my film. It is a very crucial element in this project. Fellow classmate Stephanie Clark took time in helping with my sound design.

My fellow classmates provided great feedback and also a lot of support. Together we wallowed in stress, took many coffee breaks, or grabbed a much-needed drink late in the night after spending hours in the graduate lab.

Being from Rochester N.Y. I opted to live with my parents to save on rent money. I have to thank them for putting up with me when I was in emotional distress during my time in the program. Also for basically being non-existent during the whole thesis year. Nonetheless, they have provided nothing but endless support. For South Asian parents to

allow their child to go into the artistic field is a great feat. However, they know that this is my passion had 110% back me up in it.

### **Coming up with the story**

The reason I decided to go into the field of animation is I really like the idea of building a world from scratch that people can experience. I kept this idea in mind while thinking of the idea for this film. Personally, when I watch animation I really enjoy the adventurous plotline that has the environment and colors in which I am able to get lost into. It takes me out of my element and I get a chance to adventure into a fantastical world. I wanted my film to serve the same kind of purpose. Also, my desire was to tell a story that was tied to folklore and/or came from my heritage in Nepal. Along with that, I sought to do something whimsical and really take advantage of the non-limitations of animation. I wanted it to break a physical barrier of what people normally see. In my opinion this is the point of animation. It brings a new visual experience that goes beyond the field of what a lot of our eyes see. Yet, the subject matter had to be something I wanted to investigate into more. Since this was a thesis and I would be investing a massive amount of time on it so I wanted it to be a topic of interest that excited me. For me that meant delving into the paranormal realm. It is a subject of great curiosity as it is part of the greater unknown. It also has a lot of potential in taking advantage of animation and to really get creative.

Initially, I wanted to have a storyline that was spookier and darker than what is known in the animation genre. Something that appeals to me are stories related to witches. I looked into different countries folklore about witches and came across Baba

Yaga, a Witch from the Slavic culture. She was in many ways like the Witch that I am familiar with in the western culture. Old woman, grey hair, lives in a hut in the woods, flew but her mode of transport was via mortar and pestle (sometimes a broom). She basically encompassed a lot of the repulsive features that is known in the mainstreamed world of witches. However, I knew I wanted to stray away from normal conventions of the “Witch Story.” Instead of having the flow of the plot be a witch chasing kids to later cook in her cauldron or something of that variation, I wanted the arrow to go in the other direction. Why not have the characters go towards the mysterious woman? Have the character be somewhat infatuated, or in love with her. To go after something that is intangible or unattainable can touch on people in many ways. It adds an element of sadness to the atmosphere of the film. Many years ago I had written, but not completed, a story of a man who gets infatuated by a beautiful young witch (maybe part vampire). Lately I’ve been seeing a lot of these kind of tales becoming relevant in the mainstream culture in films such as Twilight series, True Blood, etc. Though I’m not a fanatic of either I can see why they are wildly popular. The intrigue of someone mysterious, that one can’t completely figure out, someone that seemed evasive does rouse up a lot of curiosity. The story I had written had been in the back of mind brewing a little. At some point I wanted to pick it back up and continue it. I thought doing this thesis would be an opportunity for me to fulfill that goal. But, I didn’t want to do a story that became about some teenage angst with a cliché of a person being in woe over someone. I wanted it to be about a character needing the basic necessity in his or her life. In keeping it loyal to the spooky genre I decided to do somewhat of a ghost story.



I have always been intrigued by ghost stories. My family is from Nepal, a place that has a lot of mysticism embedded into its culture. A lot of the customs and tradition are driven by superstition, folklore, and sometimes the paranormal. For example, a very popular mythic ghost in Nepal is of these beautiful young ladies that roam secluded streets in the night. They have long black hair that goes down to the mid of their backs. The clothing that they wear is a white sari and they have very beautiful faces. Usually the story that goes with these myths starts off with a man riding his motorcycle late one night on a rural road. He encounters this beautiful young lady walking alongside it. Basically he is lured to her and pulls over asking if she needs a ride. The lady agrees and gets onto his motorcycle and he takes her to her destination. After that he meets her nightly and becomes very attracted to her. However, the man is getting weaker in health. Eventually he sees a witch doctor and finds out that the woman is a ghost who has been drawing out energy for him. If one were to look at her feet they will see that it is backwards. The profile of her body would reveal that she has a hollow back. The man must break off his engagements with her in order to live. Later on when looking into this myth more I found out that this tale was to regulate prostitution. Like many morals in fables, it was a way to get men scared from going out late at night and to get involved into shenanigans including prostitutes. Not only did I hear the urban legends in Nepal but I also grew up hearing about the many experiences my father and other family members had with the unknown. Though many of them chilled me to the bone I still found something in the stories hauntingly beautiful. Whether it is the imagery that conjured up my head as I listened, or the background behind the story there was always some element that I found enchanting. There was an emotion, other than scared, that stirred inside of me. I wanted

to further explore these other feelings involved. By pinpointing different roots of the emotions it made me realize the complexity of humans.

My father had lost his mother when he was only three years old. Growing up he experienced a handful of eerie events. One occurrence happened when he was about five years old. While running around the house, as most hyperactive boys do, he heard a voice from inside the house. It was a very faint distant weeping. Then he heard a woman's fragile voice crying out his name "Arun! Arun!" These events occurred in the house he grew up in which was painted white. This was later denoted as the "White House" when we refer back to my father's childhood tales. I often speculated that the reason for these eerie happenings was his mother was reaching out to him. Now I'm pretty certain that these are fallacies in my head. But the idea of it brought a fantastic tale. Another experience my father had was not exactly paranormal yet is on the stranger side of things. One night his father brought him to the balcony. He pointed across the way into the distant darkness. There off far away was a tiny hill and on top of the hill was a silhouette of a tree. Under the tree was a figure of three women. There were tiny dots of light at the end of their fingers. These dots were flames lighted on the tip of their fingers. This is a mark of people who practice witchcraft in Nepal. As he told me this story I found the image of the women under the tree intriguing. I always thought it would make for a beautiful visual and wanted to create a story around the image. It had always been tucked away in the back of my head. This became a heavy inspiration for my thesis. It also tied my idea of tying the idea of a witch into the storyline.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

I started pre-production in the spring of 2014. During this period I came up with a concept for the film and proposed it to a committee of RIT faculty members. During the proposal several questions arose regarding different elements about the story. These were questions I needed to sort out and answer.

### **Storyline**

In the beginning I had difficulty coming up with a full-bodied storyline. I knew I wanted the image of a woman under a tree entailed into the plot and that she would be the deceased wife/mother. One or both of the characters are somehow drawn to her. But I didn't know how to make a fully constructed plot. Initially, I had the father pointing out the window into the distance and showing his son the woman. The father had seen his late wife nightly and wanted to his son to see it as well. But this was basically just a description of a scene and nothing more. I struggled with making something more out of it. I know the equation of a linear plot involved a conflict of some kind. While brainstorming I remember the children 90's film "Casper," and "The Sixth Sense" and many other films about ghosts. A common theme I found among them was that of unfinished business and the ghost needing to come back to the living to make things right. Like in many films it is the idea of atonement. For my film I decided that the dynamic between the son and father would be a strained one due to one of the characters being in heavy despair from the loss of the wife/mother. The depressed character

completely shuts out the world around him including his loved one. This created the main conflict in my film. In deciding which character would be affected by the death I thought it made more sense for it to be the father as adults have more complexities emotionally. Along with that, it makes it an effective conflict because the parent is supposed to be there emotionally and physically for their children especially in times of hardship. I was certain that the boy would go out of the house into the night to see his mother. Another scene I was very determined to have was a very magical flying sequence that the son has with his mother.

Another factor in the storyline was the confrontation in the beginning between the father and son. What is the exchange between them that causes the father to get upset with the son? In my initial proposal I had the son reading a book on the floor. He sees something interesting in the book and decides to show his father, who is busy reading his own book. After the son interrupts his father reading a few times the father loses his temper and almost slaps the son. This causes the son to run out of the house. However, this beginning exchange seemed arbitrary. I felt that the son had to be showing the father something that tied in with the mother. The son should be fiddling with something that had to do with the mother to make the story come in full circle. The idea of a locket with a picture of the son, father, and mother in happier times was a tangible representation of what the son was yearning for and to get his father's attention. By having the son trying to open it with a key showed him wanting to have that love and affection back in his life. It was a place that he wanted to get back to with his father. Having the beginning and middle of the story ironed out I still had the conclusion lingering. The role of the father was still unresolved.

In my initial proposal the son runs out of his house after a fight with his father. Everything plays out as mentioned in above. The boy sees his mother standing at the cliff, she gives him the power to fly, and he goes back home after that experience. But it ends there with no real solution. Again, it was more of a glorified scene rather than a complete story. Although I got certain points nailed down in the plot the role of the father was still hard to define. His character did not go through any changes and did not add any value to the story. There was no story arch. Basically I didn't know how to use him in the plot and how to remedy the solution between him and his son. I did not know if he would be part of the journey or staying put in the house. He could either be the motivator in getting his son to leave the house. Another big question was if the father would experience the magic as well. Or would the magic be only contained to the son's experience creating an ambiguity on whether it was just the son's imagination. I realized that the experience of my film would be unrewarding if I let things be between the father and son. There would have been no real point in my film and the audience would just take away a story about flying and be left unfulfilled. I went back to revise my story. Going back and revisiting the idea of atonement I asked myself the question of why did the mother reach out to her son? My answer: so that she could remind her son of a parent's love. That is the factor that is currently lacking in the relationship with his father. But then I asked myself how will this affect that father? Will this change him? How will this serve as a solution to reconnect the father with his son? Then I thought of the idea that through the son's experience with his mother he would take the love she reminded him of back into the house and remind his father of it as well. But I asked myself how? It would have to be seen in the animation somehow. Then I thought of the gesture of a hug.

It was a form that showed he embraces his father, which is the juxtaposition of their body language in the beginning of the film where there is a physical and emotional distance. By being fully embraced by his mother the son is fueled with a lot of love and courage to break the emotional and physical barrier his father put up. In making this choice it also help me to decide that the father does indeed experience a sliver of the mother's magic. Also, by making the father see the light wisps also answers the question of whether this is all real or not. This is where the locket from the beginning comes into play. When the light wisp comes in and magically opens the locket that was once broken revealing a picture of the mother, father, and son during happier times. It snaps the father out of his distressed and cold state realizing although his wife is gone his son is still there and they still have each other.

### **Storyboard**

After having the story nailed down it was time to start visual process. I started storyboarding and figuring out the different camera angles. I broke the story into three sequences: living room, outside, and living room again. I found it especially hard to do the beginning living room sequence. This was the part of the plot that held a bulk of information in the story. Getting the right camera angles was especially crucial. There was a lot of emotions that needed to be shown with close ups and medium shots. It was a lot of cause and reaction between the characters. As a result the scene entailed a lot of shots to show the father and son's expressions. The camera had to capture the tension between the two and go back and forth a bit. I had to keep all of this in mind. Once I got past that part the rest was a bit easier. In the flying sequence I kept it a bit loose and literally had one panel of the boy flying into the sky. I kept it this way because I did not

want this part to be as rigid and planned out as the other. I wanted it to be more organic and creative as possible. It would be the area where I could play around with different visuals and visual effects the most.

### **Animatic**

Once I was fairly satisfied with the storyboarding I move on to doing the animatic. As I followed my storyboard I again realized the beginning living room scene was problematic. I had drawn it from all different angles. Since this is a 2D film this posed as an issue because it would complicate the background. For example, I had one shot of the father sitting on the chair with the camera straight on. The following angle was from the son's point of view looking at the father. This change the entire angle of what the living room is. Had this been a 3D film this would not have been a problem. I had a variety of other angles along with this. If I were to keep it this way I would have to draw the background and all of the elements (i.e. the father's chair) in all the different perspective. This would consume a lot of time, not to mention to keep the consistency of look of the living room would be incredibly difficult. I was a bit stuck about this and swelled up with stress. I went back to my storyboard and reworked the beginning angles out again. I made a definitive decision in keeping camera stationary but have different close ups and medium shots. The decision to keep the camera angle the same simplified the scene with the same angle. It cut down the number of shots while maintaining the tension between the characters. It also relieved me of a lot of tension I had with background. Once this was solidified I again went back to my animatic and input these panels. After reviewing the animatic with my thesis committee a critique that came up was how lateral the overall

film was. There was not a lot of variety in camera movement. Generally speaking I am pretty conservative with my angles. It posed as a challenge however I agreed that there need to be some variation in the angles. In areas where I decided to change this was during the cliff sequence. When the son arrives to the cliff and the light wisps continue to fly across to the other side. The camera would be positioned behind the mother just enough to partially reveal the outline of her head. Also, there is one shot (actually one of my favorite in the film) when the boy gets lifted into the sky and the camera is upward angle. I had this planned in my head from the film's conception. Another area where I varied up the angles was the ending living rooms sequence. I had shots that were straight on and also shots of the door that led to the outside of the house. Finally after the third revision of my animatic I was ready to move on to the production process.

## **PRODUCTION**

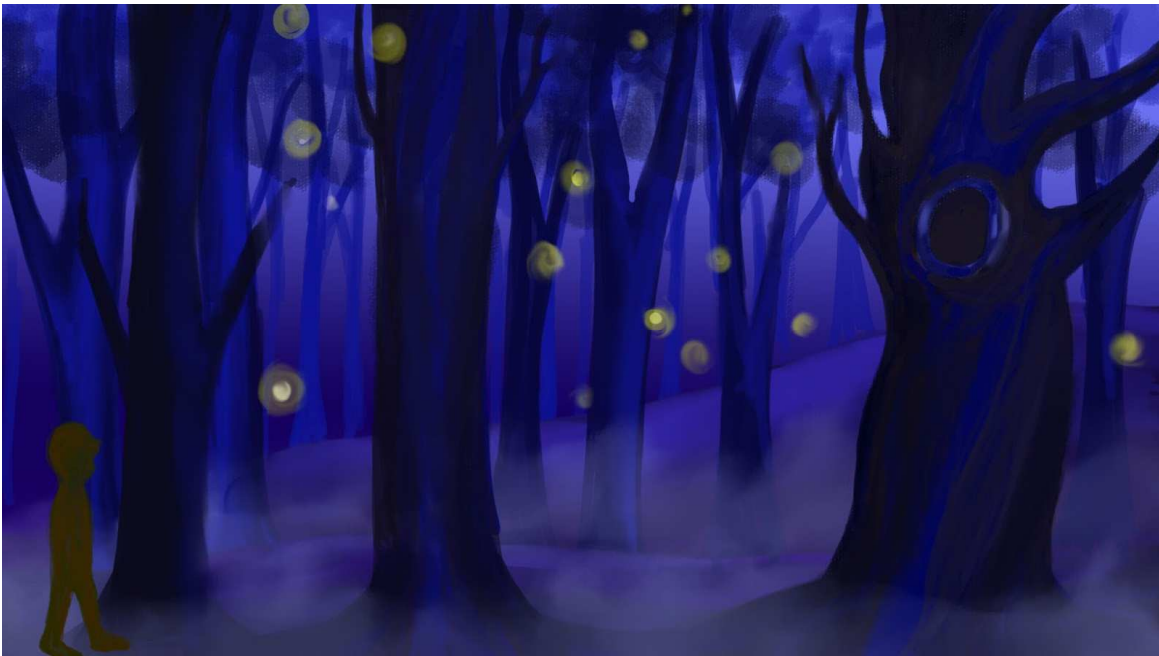
The production process came underway around the month of November. It was during this stage that I found things coming together visually. Also, places of hardship in the character design and animation.

### **Background**

From the very beginning I wanted my film to have very strong visuals. The backgrounds would stand as a prominent structure. This story has a very magical quality to it so I wanted to give that element through the environment. While working on the storyboard I simultaneously did some concept designs. This helped me create a color script for the film. I have a tendency to be inclined to vibrant colors. This also rings true for this film. I wanted to give it a similar feel as a children's storybook. As a result I



created a lot of textures and brilliant colors. By doing the concept designs it help me see the style I was going for and how my film would come together. I find more joy and have an easier time to do exterior scenes than indoors. As a result I started off with the forest scene first. This was one of the scenes I had easily completely visualized in my head.

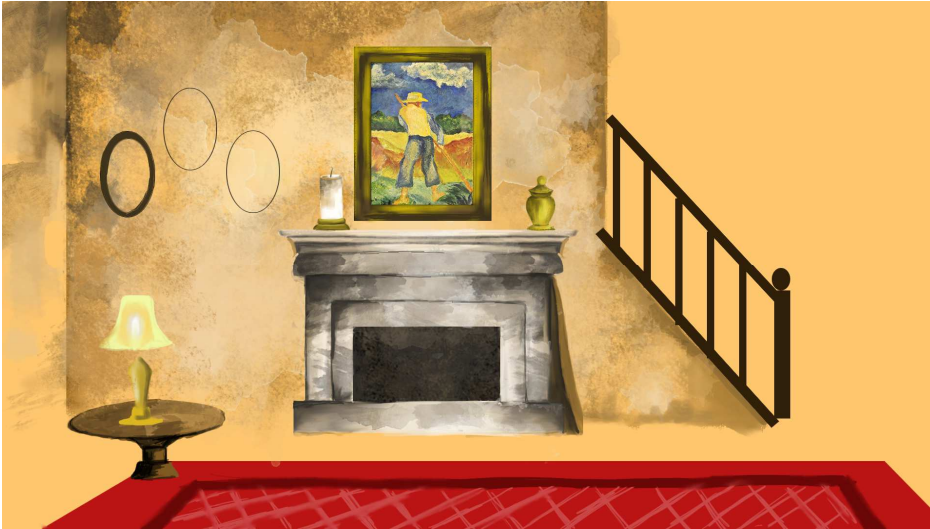


The scene had to look haunting yet beautiful. I did not want the dark forest to seem menacing but more of a tranquil yet engaging and intriguing. In fact, I wanted to all of the scenes to be fueled with intrigue. Also as the film progressed more and more of these light wisps will appear. It added to the whimsical quality of the film and also served as the “yellow brick road” for the character to follow. Once I had finished the concept designs the first thing I worked on in the production process were the backgrounds. This would also help me block out the characters when animating as well. When looking for styles I looked into some children books such as “Where the wild things are” as well as Disney movies as a source of inspiration. I used my concept design as an infrastructure to build upon. I added textures to give it a more completed look. The result became like this:



Having completely the forest scene that set what the style of the background would be for the entire film. I was pretty happy about how this background turned out. It is hard to start from a blank page but I knew I enjoy doing backgrounds and it comes easier to me than the other processes of animation. It helps me loosen up and allows my creative juices to flow. I moved on to the next background, which was the living room scene. Interiors are usually not my forte, as it seems like it is more technical. Generally I like to keep things loose and organic however I had many stipulations to consider when drafting this background. Also, having struggled with storyboarding it I had to keep in mind how things were going to be placed and blocked so that the camera angles would remain consistent without having to change the backgrounds. I started off with a few sketches. There was going to be distance between the father and son so I had to place where the father was sitting on the opposite side of where the son is. The fireplace was going to be

between the two characters. At first, I incorporated stairs into the room. It was situated along the back wall with the profile of it leading upstairs. To add to that it had other articles that ornated the room giving it a friendlier appearance.



After reviewing it with my advisor he suggested on removing it as it suggested openness. That was not a feeling that I wanted this particular scene to give. So, I revised the layout so that the living room was mostly comprised of a wall to give a feeling of isolation and distance. Also, it gave a feeling of being trapped inside a room for the father and son with lack of communication.

I chose more earth tone colors to add to the dullness and seclusion of the environment. For the wall texture I experimented with different Photoshop brushes. I came up with a few different renderings of the living room. While trying out the different brushes I came across a watercolor one. I played around with the layering of the strokes. They had some transparency to them. It gave a stain like quality much like a coffee mug leaving a ring on a surface does. When I added more watercolor mark on different layers it changed the colors. This added an aged like quality and made the house seem a bit run down and not taken care of. After using many layers to add the texture I got the finalized

look of the wall. To add some assets I used an old painting I did that mimicked Van Gogh. The fireplace took some time, as it was hard to create the right line weights without it looking cartoony and to match the realistic quality of the wall. I had to play around a bit with different dry brushed to create granite like texture. The chair on the other hand could have used more finesse. However the father is seated in the chair the whole time so a majority of it would not be seen.



The interior background took the most to work on. However I was surprised how much I actually enjoyed doing it. I tried out new and different techniques to get the look with the textures and learned much more about Photoshop through this.

Once the hardest background was squared away I move onto the scene where the boy runs outside of the house. I wanted the sky to be the main attraction in this scene. It marked the beginning of when the magic begins in the film. So at this point the sky had to look really awesome. I used very saturated colors to juxtapose the more muted color palette inside of the house. In my storyboard I had magenta. It was a color I wanted to



incorporate as it complemented the dark purples and blues. In hindsight I wish I had done more of an upward angle to highlight the sky better. In my head I pictured the clouds and the colors having a lot of movement. I think that I could've pushed this further with the animation in the sky. In spite of that I do like how the colors were finalized.



This was the last concrete background that I needed to do. The rest was mainly the sky scene, which I would create according to the movement of the boy.

For the cliff scene I had done a concept design for that part as well. Looking back at it however I realize the level of the cliff and hill are at the same level creating a too linear like quality.

If I were to go back and revisit that sequence again I would have figured out a different angle that was more interesting. There were a few shots from different angles I had initially storyboarded in this scene that did not happen. While I was in the process of creating backgrounds I created a whole background from when the boy approaches the cliff where the viewpoint is from the front where the mother is standing and looking at

him approaching. This was to change how linear the film was and to add a different angle. It also made more sense in the storytelling process because it would introduce the mother in a better way. The camera would be from behind her and she would partially be in view in the foreground. The boy would be in the background walking towards the camera/her. Therefore it would already be set up that there is this mysterious figure waiting for him. And then in the next shot the camera will be from the viewpoint that it is in in the film. However, due to time constraints this was nicked. Also, much like the living room scene it made things less complicated to make the camera view point at the same position to save time from drawing everything at different angles. I took my concept design from the cliff sequence and like the forest scene used it as a basis for foundation and built up from it. Again the main focus was the characters and most of the composition comprised of the sky. The only other element in the sequence is the cliff, the hill, and the tree.

### **Character Design**

After getting a good lead in my backgrounds I move onto the character designs. I found out quickly that this for me was by far the hardest part. What made it difficult was trying to find a style that would fit in the with backgrounds. The backgrounds were very textured, whimsical and realistic. However it will be difficult to apply that same technique onto the characters, as it will make animating them a nightmare. I struggled for a bit to come up with a design. I thought of going the route of making the characters on the more developmental side. Having them maybe filled with shaky lines that didn't remain consistent. However, this did not look good with my backgrounds. This was a major stress factor in the process of creating my film. At certain points I regretted doing

such ornate backgrounds. Then out of frustration and also worried about getting too stuck on something I decided to roughly animate shapes. I thought maybe then something would come about. And finally something did come about. Although the design could have been pushed a bit further. I soon realized when moving these shapes it was not as fluid as I wanted. The animation was a bit rough and stiff. As a result the first half of the film was a bit frigid. Animating is not my forte however I intend on improving it as I work more and do more projects.

### **Animating**

The first scene that I started working on to animate was the living room sequence as I knew this required the most amount of time. There was a lot of requirement in the facial expressions, body language, and movement. It had to convey a lot of emotions, as it was the build up of the storyline. Also it was the sequence that required a lot of shots. Especially close ups to capture the intensity and heat of the moment. The part I had the most issue with was when the boy has difficulty opening the locket and walks over to the father. I definitely think that the execution of this scene could have been better. I really had a hard time keeping the boy consistent. His head kept getting bigger and the lines were dancing way too much in the animation. Everything was big wiggly and the movement was stiff and not smooth. Also the walk cycle of the boy was a bit off. The leg kept getting longer and short. At one point there is even a slight jump in the frames. I should have put more in between in this area. Once I roughly animated this scene I jumped around to other parts of the story. The one that I had the most fun with was the flying sequence as it was more organic and not as technical. It did not have to be as rigid

as the other parts. It was a place I could really experiment and have fun with. I did worry about the consistency of the shape however. As a result I decided that he would become yellow glowing figure when he is being lifted up from the cliff. I justified this change by having in this form to have an ability for him to fly. It fit perfectly into the story without seeming out of place. This particular part of the film had to be extraordinary. A lot of kids often daydreaming about flying and I really wanted the audience to get a very awe-inspiring experience. This was the climactic part of the film that had to include great visual, emotions and music. It really had to have that wow factor. In order for the the scene to live up to it's moment I added a lot of magical elements. One of these elements were the colorful dust flying into the sky. They are swimming around and swirling about in the sky alongside the boy.

A segment within the flying sequence I enjoyed animating was the scenes with the dark clouds and the flash of lights. I was inspired by the Dreamworks film "The Prince of Egypt." The part that was very visually appealing and gave a sense of awe was when Moses parted the Red Sea. The characters walk through and you see a wall of water rising up on both sides.





I found this to be very beautiful as it gave a perspective that we would not normally see. The film used the advantage of animation by allowing the audience to see what a split sea would look cut in half. The lighting is beautifully done with hues of aqua greens and blues behind the whale, which created anti-light causing the whale to be silhouetted. There are flashes of light and each time the light flashed it revealed the whale, who is swimming, at a different location. It gets closer to the characters. Although it is a bit eerie it was a beautiful moment in that here are these people who are in turmoil fleeing their country and a whale who seems to be at peace in a tranquil environment. It reminds me how small I am and that there is a bigger world, universe and galaxy out there with other beings inhabiting it.

I wanted to use a similar effect in my film. I decided that since I have a big flying sequence to take advantage and to use it there. I had the boy fly into dark clouds until it was completely black. Then flashes of lights would show the boy flying through the clouds in different areas of the screen. I wanted to convey a feeling him being free and playing around the clouds. He flips about experimenting with his flying abilities. He has not a care in the world and has forgotten about all of his troubles. I wanted this to be a very joyous moment because the ability of him flying is very liberating. And then with the last flash his mother appears in the clouds with him. I took this opportunity to use it as a way to transition into the next sequence. When he touches the mother he drops and falls through the clouds. It looks like he has lost his ability to fly.

In the animation I had a lot of morphing to add to the fluidity of the scene. Of course the mother had to be in the sky with the boy as this was the moment where the height of emotions come. The boy gets reminded of his mother's love which is the

moment that the film has been leading up to. Since she is this non concrete physical being I made her be able to shape shift a lot. In one of the courses I took I saw a short animated film called “For Your Protection.” In the film the woman is talking about how the law was trying to protect her. They used the morphing techniques where images like an octopus's tentacle symbolized the arm of the law. I found this to be a very witty way of visualizing how the character felt. I brainstormed ideas that she will morph into images that represent a mother’s love. I thought of maybe her eyes in the background as the son is flying, or have her turn into hand. This happens after the boy starts falling and she morphs into a hand to catch him. It represents what all humans’ need, which is the love and support of another. It is a bit cliché in following the “I will catch you if you fall.” This is what the boy is currently lacking from his father. The moment that they have physical contact in the sky is a very touching moment and the pinnacle of the film. I used close ups to have its to be only about the boy and the mother. They become giant heads that fill up most of the screen as this is solely about these two characters and this moment that they are having together. Their facial expressions show them smiling but not a big grin. It is more of a small smile that is filled with ease, comfort, and just happiness. I have the boy’s eyes half closed to show that this is a place of familiarity. And after the longest time he feels a place of warmth that is home in his mother’s arm.

## **POST PRODUCTION**

After animating a majority of the film I started the compositing process. I think that this part comes as my 2nd favorite behind creating the background because I start seeing the film coming together. And sometimes during the process I get some new ideas

to play around with. I used the software AfterEffects which I highly enjoy utilizing. I like building things from scratch and felt like I was doing this when using this software. It was like I was constructing all of the elements I made together to build an environments. The first scene I composited was when the son runs out of the house. I added effects to the sky to enhance it more as it supposed to be a magical spectacle. I played around with the different effects. I created a new blank color layered and made it more transparent. I overlaid it on top of the sky layers I did in Photoshop. I added little animation to it by keying very subtly the movement of the textures. I found that this added to the movement of the clouds. Another place I prominently did this technique was of course in the flying sequence. I did a couple layers of effects. There was one called rosewater which created some blotchy textures. When I made them transparent the blotches created a cloud like effect and made them look like they were off into the distant. I speckled the sky with stars giving it more of a glittery quality. When the camera moved they sparkled which was an unintended effect. However it added to the enchanted ness of the moment. I added a glowing effect to the boy in his flying form. It made him look a bit radioactive. I also added the rosewater texture on him to make it look lava-esque.

When compositing the living room sequence I imported the separate elements, such as the wall, fireplace, chair, painting and floor, into a 3D space. I placed them as if i were building a set for a theatre. I had to place them according to the perspective of the camera to avoid seeing crack and black gaps between the elements. Also the placement had to be blocked in the same way as the storyboard. The main idea was to convey the feeling of isolation. In order to give off that feeling I placed the chair the father sits in on the opposite of the fireplace. The son sits on the other end with the fireplace between

them. The space is mostly contrived of wall to give a claustrophobic effect. There is no one else to interact with but just the son and the father. I did not even include a window in the front view of the living room to make it look like there was no escape. For the fire in the fireplace I used a particle effect. The style of the particles I used were bubbles. I made the gravity in the negative so that the particles would fly upwards. Then I changed the colors of the particles to yellow, orange and red. I also increased the amount of particles that get generated which decreased the look of the appearance of bubbles to more like flames.

For the forest sequence I added fog that was low hanging onto the ground. I made a layer that had a cloudy texture. I created a mask over it so that it took up only a quarter of the scene. Then I made it less opaque and keyed in the movement of the texture. It worked out perfectly as it added to the intriguing mysteriousness of the scene. For the wisps I created a few solid layers of yellow. Then I did a few eclipse masks and keyed them to rotate in a slow circular motion and feather out the edges. The idea of this was that more and more wisps will be seen as he gets closer to his destination. After compositing all of these layers together I worked on the lighting of the scene. Again I created a solid layer and put a circular mask. I darkened the mask while having a transparency to overlay the rest of the scene. This gave a more dim lighting, which added to the tone. In hindsight I could have added more shadows from the trees and maybe a little moonlight trickling through the branches to create a more tranquil yet mystifying scene. It would have also been a bit more realistic and from a technical standpoint logical.

One of my favorite scenes I loved compositing (and my favorite scene in general) is the one shortly after the boy's transformation into being yellow. He is spinning in a circle and the camera is at an upward angle shooting into the sky. The edges of the screen are lined with the silhouette of pine trees. The camera slowly zooms in and there are colors of lying dust swirling around the boy. I really enjoyed building this shot. It created a new perspective that brought a different experience from the rest of the film. The audience is able to see the film from the ground looking up. With visual art, I like when things are shown from a different angle. Especially when it is not something that is usually seen (i.e. a flying boy). It allows a boundary to be broken and going beyond the scope of what people usually see in life. I loved adding the colorful dust swirling around the boy. It gave a lot of color as well as highlighted the boy in the center. To me it was just a lot of whimsical magic going on which is what I wanted. It caused for a very tranquil yet awe inspiring moment. The illusion of making something seem like it's facing upward when really the camera is just shooting straight ahead while the different scene elements are drawn in that perspective, is what made this really neat and one of the many reasons I enjoy creating films.

At the ending of the film which takes place back in the living room I changed the angle of the shot from the beginning sequence. I had a straight on view of the father with medium shots to close up shots. This was to see the father's expression more. There is one shot which reveals the door and the light wisp entering into the room. It is the first time we see another part of the living room. This was also an important shot to capture because the father would see the wisp coming in. It answered a lot of questions about whether this was real or not. I was a bit worried that by revealing the door it would

complicate how the rest of the living room would look according to that angle. However, I remedied this by doing a shot from a straight on angle on to the door and medium close ups. This helped make things less complicated in terms of rearranging all the other items and having to redraw things from a different perspective. Doing this film made me realize how important camera placement is. Storyboarding is quite an essential process to avoid any hiccups in angling of the scenes. I was glad I had re drafted it three times as it made the compositing process easier.

SOUND I knew from the beginning that I did not want any dialogue. I wanted the story to be told through facial expression and movement of the character. However, music would be an integral part of the film. I wanted it to blanket the film. It would help steer the animation and make it choreographed. By the time I had found a composer I had already been animating and compositing. I sent him what I had which was far more developed than just an animatic. While we discussed ideas I told him I wanted the pinnacle of the music to be during the scene in which the boy and mother meet in the sky. This will help heighten the emotions during the climactic moment. I was definitely happy with the results my composer had given me. He understood that this film was suppose to be touching and the music he created definitely aided in creating that atmosphere. He also added a range of tones for the music. In the beginning the mood of the film is a bit glum. He sets the tone with a soft piano playing in the background. The music also adds to the dynamic between the father and son which is not a very happy one. The music cues also really work in tandem with the film. When the boy walks over to the window and the light wisps comes into view the music changes drastically. It loses the glum melody and becomes one of excitement and wonder. The instruments accompanies the boy's

curiosity. The beat becomes faster and the and the music sets off into an adventure with the boy. Going back to the scene where he meets his mother there are voices used in the music. I liked that it is singing along yet not overpowering the melody. It gives it a very haunting feel. The voices gives a hint of the mother's presence. It is as if she's singing a mother's lullaby to him. I wanted this part to have her totally enrapturing the boy physically as well as musically. Basically the whole scene is cradling the boy. This part reminded me of the music from the Lion King when the rain comes and sets over the landscape. The chorale of voices is humming to the melody of the music. For me it gave me a feeling of the kingdom of Pride Rock singing a hymn. In my film it was the mother's hymn to the boy.

For the sound effects I found most of them online where they were free and open to use. My sound design was not too complex. It was more of an aid to make things a little more realistic. In the beginning sequence I added the fireplace crackling as well as a very light drizzle in the background. This gave a very somber ambience to the mood of the scene. For the light wisp I knew it has to be a very mysterious sound. It was an element in the film that is unknown yet it had to be mystifying. However it could not be spooky as it was suppose to attract the son to follow it and not something for him to fear. To get this kind of feeling I added what sounded like cymbals being light drummed on with some chimes. It was a more whimsical sound to add to the mystery of the wisp. As soon as the boy leaves the house I added the sound of light wind howling in the background. When he reaches the cliff and opens his mouth I added a gasp for when he is taken aback and sees his mother. Then when she blows I added the sound of air being blown out of her mouth. When the mother transforms into a wind into the air I added a

blowing noise, but different than the previous blow sounds, as well. This sound was more of a mixture of blowing from the mouth with the wind. It was a warping like sound to go with the transformation of the mother changing into the dark wind. For the part where the colorful dusts surrounds the boy and swirls about his I added a windchime like noise to further enhance the idea that he is going through a transformation. While he is flying these sounds continue along with what sounds like drum cymbals. I synced it to the sound of his movement. In the end I liked this effect because the boy is glowing and shimmering. The sound accompanying his flying adds an effectiveness to him flying. He himself has become part of this magical world and an element of it himself. This sound accentuated this idea.

When the boy returns home the sound effects were really essential in telling what's going on. It starts off with the father, who is still in his chair in the living room, looking down at the locket then the sound of the door opening is heard. It is then followed by the sounds of footsteps which is the boy walking back into the house. This really helped cut a corner in animating. Instead of having to show the boy come through the door and doing all the animation the sound took care of all of that. All the information was told through the sound effects. The last sound effect I added is when the locket pop opens. Looking back at the film I noticed that it was a little off synced by a fraction of a second. If I were to revisit it again I would place the sound of the pop in the proper place to get a proper effect. I think the sound effects as a whole really help enhance the film. I didn't have a complicated sound design but without them the story would feel like it had something missing. It gave it a little spark of life.



Generally, the critiques during the screening went pretty well. No one had extremely bashed my films or said anything humiliating. Also there was no awkward silence where people could not formulate any response. I found this to be a certain level of achievement. There was a few constructive critiques about certain areas in my film.

A critique that I had received was regarding the beginning of the film in the animation. The commentator said he was a bit startled about how stiff the animation was. However, as the film progressed things got better. I agree with this comment. I struggled with the animation quite a bit throughout the film. I have a lot of improvement and practicing to do there. Part of the issue was the construction of the character design. I need to spend more time in that process. I still have a hard time understand how joints, shoulders, arms, legs and other ligaments are connected. Perhaps I need to study more on this and fully immerse myself in learning the body's design. I also need to study more about the movement of things. There needs to be more easing in and out of positions. My animation for the most part is pretty even which took away from the personality of the characters. Also I never really finalized any of the looks of the characters which caused a problem. I didn't really have a base template to refer back to. This created a lot of inconsistencies with the shapes and sizes. Along with that I tend to be more heavy handed in things. I like to be more impressionistic in my style. So for me it makes it especially hard to keep the lines steady. I really think I need to be more practiced in this and have more patience as well.

Another critique was about the design of the locket. The commentator said that the it did not look like a locket but more like a pocket watch so it made him not wonder or care about it. So at the end when the locket was shown again it did not really come full

circle to him. I think what I could have improved was the sound that the key made when the boy was trying to open it. It made more of a whirring noise which made it sound like something was getting wound up instead of a key trying to unlock it. Also the size of the locket could have been a bit smaller. Instead of choosing circular shape I should have chosen one that less resembles a watch like an oval or even heart. Having the boy wear it around his neck may have also defined it more as a locket

Another comment I received was that I knew where my strength and weaknesses were and I was smart in using it to my advantage. My strengths were in the use of color and background design. Also how to use the effects. Again this was echoing one of the previous comments that my animation needed a bit work. I did use my background in fine art to play a big part in this film. My passion for background art was used to its potential however I did not want it to come across as me using it as a crutch.

In the last critique I received the commentator said that the flying sequence was a little long. I partially agree with this comment. For me, it could have been shortened a bit during the first sequence where the boy transitions into yellow and is flying around. Also in the following scene where it is dark and as the light flashed he views him. Both of these together could have been cut down by maybe 10 seconds. The view will get bored with it as it is not really doing anything after a while. Also another issue he brought was a transition from the cliff sequence that goes back into the living room scene. The transition goes to a bright white. This was misleading as it seems as though the night has turned into day. As a result, when the shot of the wisp coming through the door reveals that it is night out created confusion. I do like the transition to white as the mother is disintegrating into air to hint that she was going back to an heavenly afterlife.

Transitioning to black would have not fit in this moment. It would have taken away from the angelic look and made it less touching. However I think that when the light is turning bright it gives a look as if the sun is rising and the sky is getting lighter. It goes from a dark purple to a very light pink which looks like the sun's presence is there. The colors in sky resembles the dawn of morning. What I could have improved is to fine tune the effect. I used the lighting in after effects. When I increased the amount of brightness it created rays since the light was located behind the cloud. These rays added to the look of a sun. In hindsight I could have moved the cloud so that it did not create that effect. Or find another effect in after effects to transition it to white more smoothly.

An aspect that was received well in my film was the color palette. People liked the saturation of the colors and the textures. They also responded well to the backgrounds and the effects.

#### Reflection

Experience: This was by far the most linear project I have done since my time in the program. I am a person who does not plan too much, and when I do I get excited and jump into something. In this project I had spent a good amount of time in the pre-production stage. It really does help to have this segment in the process to be as refined as possible as it helps to decrease any hurdles and issues later on. As a student I feel like I will learn to have a better pipeline in the production process when working out in the field. My workflow definitely has room to grow to make things more efficient. Part of the hinderance in the production was the time constraint.

There were many aspects I enjoyed in working alone on this project. One being I could develop an idea and carry it through from its conception to execution with my

vision being carried out. Wearing the different hats of being the writer, director, editor etc was a fun challenge. I learned a lot on just how to do things and became a jack of all trades. And there was just the general rewarding feeling of having completing something on my own. However there are some aspects that were tough. As a solo person on a project it's hard to take on many of the roles in creating a film. You can get tangled in your own web. One major subject I can definitely learn when collaborating with others or in a team is I can learn more about the workflow. It will also teach me how to keep my files organized. I have yet to master how to organize and divide all of the different aspects of my film. If I were to pass my thesis files project on to another person they would be totally confused. Certain processes that can take up time in the production will get extradited with the help of others.

There are parts of the process that I jumped into which I should have paused, thought about it, try out different ways before trying to just get it right in the first pass. This is a mistake I make time and again. I get very anxious and just want to hit the ground running. However, in the long run it makes things easier and faster when things are more carefully planned. There is a lot of trial and era that needs to be done. Sometimes it's good to scratch what is done and start all over. Again, for me this part could have been done in the character design. It is hard to working on something when one is stuck or having a creative block, which is what I experienced during that developmental stage. But the only real way to remedy this is to keeping working on it until the tenseness is gone. If I had spent a lot of time I could have a sheet with different poses and a turnaround of the character's figure to refer to. It would have resolved a lot of inconsistencies in my thesis.

There are moments in the film that I am really pleased with. They hit spots in the right way that I wanted visually and emotionally. There are also moments where I can definitely see room for improvement. The moments that I am happy with are the shorter scenes such as him running out of the house, walking through the woods, and the upward shot of him spinning in the sky. What I like about it is the general movement of the pieces and the backgrounds.

Going into this I was intimidated by the amount of animation I had to do. It is ironic since I am in a program to study animation however this is one of my weaker strengths. It's something that I have to polish up. Part of it was not spending enough time on them for fear that if I spent too much time on it I would have to cut back on my time in the background elements. The other part was simply not having the patience of going back and re-doing things. The boy's walk cycle in the living room sequence needs a lot of refinement. If I had just practiced and tried multiple times of getting it right that would have improved that scene a lot.

I noticed when the whole screen is filled with white in the transition and it is fading back into the living room there is a drastic change of the bright light with the living room being revealed underneath. It created a popping effect visually which is a bit jarring to the eye. It was not seamless and takes the viewer out of the moment. This was a mistake in the editing on my end.

There were frequent times during the production of this film I felt burnt out, insecure, and didn't know if I could have a good quality project. However, I'm proud to say I got through it to the best of my ability. I spent countless days in the graduate for

roughly on average 10 hours/day. However, this project has furthered my skills and knowledge as animator.

# **Tara Ja**

Thesis Proposal by Mahima Tuladhar.  
Masters of Fine Arts in Computer Animation.  
Rochester Institute of Technology.  
School of Film and Animation

Approved for Submission By:

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**Charles Bandla**

(Thesis Proposal Advisor )

## Synopsis

A young boy vying for his father's attention is pulled outside where he is taken into a whimsical experience.

## Treatment

In a dim candle lit room a young boy (around 8) is reading on the floor of a living room. The room resembles a lavishly furnished cabin complete with leather chairs. An older long faced man sits in a chair reading a book. The boy seeing something interesting in his book holds it up to show the man. The man responds by looking at him sternly for a second as if he is upset that the boy interrupted his reading then returns back to his book. The boy sulks and has a look of dismay. Right then he hears some whispering coming from outside. He looks at the man who appears to not have heard it as he remains in his reading position. The boy, fueled with curiosity, walks over to the window and looks outside. In the night sky there are showers of shooting stars streaking across the sky. The boy runs out the door to have a closer look at the glittering dust dancing above. Something catches his attention in the distance. He looks out across the way where a small hill lies. Settled on top of the hill stands a broad tree whose thick branches stretch out in every direction. At the trunk of the tree there are floating lights circling around. At a closer look there is a silhouette of a woman dancing around the base of the tree. Her fingertips are lit with flames as if they were candles. The boy wanders to the edge of the grassy knoll in front of their house facing the hill with the tree.

The woman dancing stops and look across the distance towards the boy. The boy makes eye contact with her and smiles. She blows out on to the palm of her hands where some dusts fly in to the air towards the boys direction. The tree begins to glow and starts shaking its branches resulting in more dust to fly out. These dust form into whimsical figures and shapes as they fly out dancing across the air above the valley. Figures of mythical creatures are amongst the shapes. As they reach the boy they swirl around him and lift him up into the air. He laughs as he is floating with the shapes and doing flips while playing with them. He pokes at them with his finger as if they were bubbles. The woman standing at the tree smiles as she watches. The boy continues to play and laugh. Slowly the figures disappear one by one and he is brought back down onto the grassy knoll. The boy looks happy and content. He looks and stares across to the woman on the hill and gives a little wave. She waves back.

The boy runs back into his house where his father is still sitting in the chair and reading. Above the mantle on the fireplace is a portrait of him, his father, and the woman on the hill (his mother). The boy looks out of the window. The woman below the tree turns into light particles that swirl into the air until she becomes the stars in the night sky.



## **Rationale**

When I was younger my father, who is from Nepal, used to tell me his childhood stories while growing up there. Being born and raised in the United States I knew my heritage was from there but for me I felt a disconnect with it. Nepal was a country I only knew about in stories. It was this mythical far away land that seemed unattainable. I only got a taste of it when my father revealed in his memories of his childhood. His stories filled me with excitement and awe. They were riddled with wonderment and he described them with beautiful visual imagery. Also in many of the stories there was a great deal of mysticism involved. In the house he grew up in he had very strange and unexplainable paranormal encounters. A lot of his encounters dealt with ghostly woman figures. To add on to that he lost his mother at the age of three. As I got older I would connect the two and hatch up a fallacy in my head that these ghostly encounters were his mother reaching out to him. I speculated that she was worried about him since she was not able to take care of him as he grew up. Therefore from time to time she would make these contacts with him. One story that he recollected was on one night when his father took him to the rooftop of their house and pointed into the direction. On a hill where a tree stood there were three women who had their fingers lighted with candles encircling the tree. They were practicing witchcraft. As I was told this story a hauntingly beautiful image came to my mind. I wanted to expand on this image as I saw it having potential for a visually stunning story.

To execute this project I plan on using the softwares TV Paint, Photoshop, Maya, and AfterEffects. My backgrounds will mainly be 2D with some structures in 3D. The characters will be designed in 3D. The segment where the boy is lifted into the air will be completely in 2D save for the boy. That scene will also be filled with vibrant colors and textures. The beginning scene inside the house will be more of a muted color palette. I will apply a painterly style to the backgrounds.

## **Technique**

I am treating this as a mood piece with a good level of choreography to the characters movement. They will not be dancing but have a nice flow to their animation similar to that of Paperman. The narration of the story will heavily rely on facial expressions and gestures. For sound there will be some effects such as wind and footsteps. I am avoiding dialogue save for the part where the whispers are heard. I intend on finding a composer as the film will be blanketed with music.

Budget

<b>Pre Production</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>In Kind</b>	<b>Total</b>
Story and Script		yes	\$0
External Hard Drive	\$50	no	\$50

**Production**

AutoDesk Maya	\$3,500	yes	\$0
Photoshop	\$700	yes	\$0
AfterEffects	\$999	yes	\$0
TVPaint	\$1,330	yes	\$0
Modeler/Rigging	\$100	no	\$100

**Post-Production**

Sound Effects	\$100	yes	\$100
Music Composer	\$60	no	\$60
Final Cut Pro	\$800	yes	\$0

Coffee	\$100	no	\$100
Festival Fees	\$200	no	\$200

**Total : \$610**

	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M
	A	P	A	U	U	U	E	C	O	E	A	E	A	P	A

	R	R	Y	N	L	G	P	T	V	C	N	B	R	R	Y
Story	X														
Character and Concept Design		X	X	X	X										
Storyboard/Animatic					X	X									
Final Story Board/ Editing						X	X								
Animatic with Composed Music								X							
Animation Production								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Final edits and credits												X	X	X	
Screening															X