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Deadly Pleasure

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Deadly Pleasure

By

Chunhui Bao

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

In this work, a girl’s father is one of the victims in the mass political persecution by Emperor Yongzheng, 18 A.D., and he is killed in front of his family. The Emperor is present during his murder and he notices the girl and her gorgeous, long hair. Because of this the girl survives the massacre of her entire family and is sent away and trained to become a concubine. It becomes the goal of the girl to work hard to become a chosen concubine by the Emperor so she can avenge the murder of her family with her gorgeous, magical hair.

Deadly Pleasure is my Master’s of Fine Arts thesis film with a total runtime of five minutes and thirteen seconds. It is a 2D animation that was produced primarily in TVpaint, Photoshop, and After Effects.

This paper outlines the entire creation process of making this 2D animated film. It details the very beginning of the story ideas to the final screening version. It describes all my intentions, obstacles, challenges and successes, as well as the problem-solution process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I would like to thank my adviser, Professor Stephanie Maxwell in the School of Film and Animation. I cannot tell how many meetings we had in the past year, but I do remember every meeting and every change in my work, my thesis like a little baby growing up. In the beginning it was just an idea, over and over again my story was building in my mind and it grows up in Stephanie’s calendar book, too. It is so easy when a student gets stuck in the middle of her thesis, comes with some impossibly hard problems, or the story gets off the point. I am very appreciative of all the valuable suggestions Professor Maxwell offered.

I would also like to thank my two committee members, Professor Brian Larson and Professor Atia Quadri for their suggestions and feedback that kept my thesis on track.

A special thank you to my composer, Eddy Liu. He is talented, imaginative and also a quick worker. I believe we had a kind of tacit and intuitive understanding. His second version of the music did not need any changes, because he created the music I dreamed of.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my family, friends, and my husband, Bo Ding. With their support and care I was able to complete this thesis film.
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INTRODUCTION

The making of my graduate thesis film *Deadly Pleasure* began in March 2013 and lasted until December 2014 as a final project within the MFA animation program in the School of Film & Animation at Rochester Institute of Technology. My work was done under the supervision of my thesis committee advisor, Stephanie Maxwell and committee members Brian Larson and Atia Quadri. The whole process consisted of pre-visualization (story development, concept design, storyboards and animatic), production (environment drawing, animation, coloring, lighting and rendering), and postproduction (music composing, sound FX and final editing).

PRE-VISUALIZATION

Story Development

In the very beginning, the inspiration behind the idea of *Deadly Pleasure* was a scene from the well-known Beijing Opera, *Sanchakou*. There are two people coming into a low, shabby thatched cottage during the night without any light or candles. Although everything is in darkness and they have never been to the cottage before, both of them feel there must be someone else or something strange going on inside. The audience of the opera watch all the characters play hide-and-seek under the bright stage lights, which is very hilarious. From this scene, I came up with an idea for my thesis: What if I could tell a story about an assassin who comes to kill someone, but another assassin has already been there and done the assassination earlier. Not only this, but the real killer does the assassination in front of the other one in the dark without the other assassin knowing it, which can make the story more dramatic.
The first version of my thesis script was the story of an assassin whose mission is to kill the Emperor. He masquerades as a servant hiding in the palace. One day, he gets his chance to murder the Emperor and hides in the Emperor’s closet. After a while he comes out of the closet but finds the Emperor already murdered and sees the real murderer -- a Concubine running away from the scene.

At this time of thinking of a thesis idea, I was trying to find a way to tell a story from a different point of view. I wanted the audience to feel as if they were part of the story, mainly by experiencing this story as one of the characters. The script idea was written as follows:

In the garden outside a small country house in China, a man Liu (Qiu’s father, 40) is planting seeds into the ground. Suddenly, horses carrying soldiers and the Emperor Yongzheng arrive at the house. The soldiers grab the man and tie him up. He is set before the emperor. Not far away, his daughter Qiu(6) is hiding in a bamboo basket. Liu’s wife, Tao, the mother of Qiu, covers the basket with her body. Qiu sees the emperor order his soldiers, “Off with his head!” At this moment Qiu is found by a soldier who kicks over the basket. Qiu rolls out from the basket. Her clothes are torn, on a bare shoulder there is a plum flower-shaped birthmark. When Qiu rises off the ground and sees the emperor, the emperor takes his bloody sword and puts the point to Qiu and cuts off Qiu’s hair bun. Qiu is terrified and the emperor laughs at her and then he gets on his horse and leaves. The soldier fans Qin and Tao.

Ten years after, in the bedroom of the emperor at the palace, a eunuch holds a tray on which there are many small wood pieces with different names on them. The emperor chooses a wood piece and then walks away.

The wood piece is hanging on the wall near a beautiful concubine who is in the bathtub. She has very long hair and she steps out of the bath making her hair into a special bun.

In the lobby of the palace, there are two eunuchs carrying the quilt-covered concubine with the special hair bun into the emperor’s bedroom. They leave the concubine on the bed and then exit the bedroom and stand guard at the door outside.
Suddenly, one of the eunuchs withdraws a dagger from his sleeve and kills the other eunuch and the guards nearby. The eunuch removes his costume. He enters the bedroom quietly and walks close to the bed of the emperor with a dagger in hand.

He raises the dagger above the emperor with the intention of killing him. Suddenly, the emperor screams in ecstasy as he and the concubine are making love. The assassin jumps back and knocks over a table. The sound surprises the emperor and he calls loudly for the imperial bodyguard. The assassin rushes into a closet.

The bodyguard rushes to the bedroom door and sees the dead eunuch and guards all around. The assassin throws the dragger and kills the bodyguard. The assassin rushes to the bed and finds the emperor dead! A very long length of a woman’s black hair has strangled the emperor. The concubine is gone.

A few years later, Qiu feeds pigs in a country yard that looks like the one she used to live in when she was a child. There is a baby on her arm playing with her pigtail, and there is a little boy, around five years old playing with a ball nearby. A man, Qiu’s husband, comes back from work. The boy sees the man and runs towards him. The family is together in the yard and the sunset shines on their faces.

End.

After I sent the script to Professor Atia Quadri, we had a deep discussion. She suggested that I keep this story in a single storyline so I could focus more on the storytelling and the cause and effect of karma.

The final script came out after that meeting. I cleaned up the story and only kept one storyline: The concubine’s revenge. For a 5-minute film, to create a character, the eunuch assassin, whose only function is to provide a new viewpoint is distracting. After making changes to the script idea I began research and chose the Qing dynasty as the story background.

The Qing dynasty was a period that had a great society with a fusion of multi-ethnic races, and it facilitated cultural communication between races.
But like many multi-ethnic, feudal system empires, solving the problem of nationality, or races, is required of the new emperor.

Emperor Yongzheng ascended to the throne in 1723. Minority nationality “Man” became the highest class in the hierarchy system. The new emperor was worried about the different ethnic groups within the empire, like the Han group, which was the largest population. So, he began a mass political persecution campaign of the Han group officials. Most of the time all males in the family would be killed and all females would become slaves of the emperor.

After I set up the main idea of the story and story background, everything became clear. I wasted a lot of time struggling with details, background stories, and even camera positions before I thought about the structure of the story. Thinking about details too much limited my view of the whole picture. I decided to forget all the details I had thought of before. After two weeks, I came up with the final story and my advisor, Professor Maxwell said it was much better than the proposal script.

**Art Stylization**

**Stylization Research**

In a live action movie, the movements of hands and feet are usually used to describe the character's inner state as well as emotions. However, in animation, hands and feet at the ends of limbs are often ignored by animators. In my graduate film, I decided to use ‘realistic’, non-cartoony animation depiction of characters. And, a character’s head would be a very small proportion of the body, so the facial expressions could be very limited.
When thinking about the art style of this movie, I connected with the interpretation of the female role in the Peking Opera, called “Dan”. Because of the physical limitations of the opera stage, the complicated drama costumes and thick facial makeup, as well as the scrupulously prescribed lyrics, the body language of Peking Opera actors is superior to voice and expression, especially Dan. There were no female actors in the traditional opera, so the male actors had to act as women of all ages. They kept working on how to cross the gender in the performance and show the greatest artistic value when expression methods were limited.

The famous Dan actor, Mr. Lanfang Mei had once created a great reform and made many contributions in the gesture of opera. For performances in the past, predecessors rarely exposed hands in order to preserve the grave and dignified bearing of the actors. But later, Mr. Yaoqing Wang made a breakthrough in this area. And Mr. Mei inherited his achievements and further innovated boldly, deeply researching the performing arts of gesture according to all kinds of drama. [1] He had developed and created many beautiful gestures during his lifetime, which were all designed on purpose combining a character’s background, age, thoughts, and feelings. [2]
Gestures in the performance of Dan in Peking Opera are mainly reflected in the finger styles. Since most of the finger styles seem like orchids, they are collectively referred to as the "orchid finger poses". The characters in the opera have complex expressions, such as happy or angry or sad or joyous in order to reflect the external image of the character, which is an important aspect of the art of Beijing opera. [3] At the same time, the actors can also express complex inner feelings and thoughts by changing gestures. This kind of gesture can be flexibly applied to concrete details, serving as a kind of artistic body “language”. Gestures, as a kind of “language”, are extremely rich, which are sometimes even more convenient than oral language.
Mr. Mei understood gestures very well, so he paid special attention to the aspect of expression. The gestures created by him changed a lot with profound meanings. They had not only won high praises from domestic art circles but were highly valued and appreciated by international art circles. When it comes to the gesture performance of Mr. Mei, the former Soviet Union dramatist Stanislavsky sang his praises without ceasing, “Mr. Mei’s extraordinary hand has not only attracted me very much, but had a strong appeal to many famous artists in the Soviet Union as well.” [4]
After researching multiple related media, I decided to learn from master Mei Lanfang and apply Peking Opera gestures to the action design of the main actors in my film.

In my thesis, I was trying to systematize the gestures in Beijing Opera, not just with how it looks, but with how it plays out in spirit and as a means of artistic expression.

After I finished this research, I concluded that Mr. Mei’s interpretation of characters through gestures would be a great experience for me to follow. Historically, traditional oriental women are implicit and introverted about expressions of feelings.

Since my story takes place in the Qing Dynasty, and in an era of culture fusion, Confucianism was interpreted in a distorted form by other nationalities. The feudal palace was very hierarchical and with a lot of rules, which created increased difficulties for me for character design and acting. As a result, I decided to challenge myself to express thoughts and emotions mainly by a character’s gestures, rather than facial expressions. In addition, I used some famous orchid finger poses as reference and created some key frames for characters in the animation based on these poses.

**Concept Design**

Concept design is a form of visual development used to convey an idea in the animation before it is put into the next stage. It is a visual representation of the characters, backgrounds, sets and props that will define the final image style for the animation. I started creating the concept design in September 2013. At the same time that I was doing the character design and I also began to do the storyboard.
In the very beginning, I did not have any particular style in my mind. I watched some Beijing Operas trying to find some inspiration, but the traditional Beijing Opera scenery only contains simple chairs and tables. I did not think that this stage setting style could be used for reference, and considering the whole story I preferred a more realistic style.

![Figure 4: Beijing Opera stage setting](http://xiqu.91ddcc.com/c_3689.htm)

From the concept art aspect, I hesitated about using either ink painting or traditional animation as my major art style. I tried almost all the styles I could think of. I lost some of my initial draft artwork, but I still have some paintings left, like the one below:

![Figure 5: Early art style sample](http://example.com/early_art_style_sample.png)
I started to get a picture in my mind based on these very first drawings. I decided on the style I wanted to do, with consideration for the complexity for the whole art process. I decided to go for a ‘new’ ink painting style that has simple organic shapes and a simple hand drawing line and uncomplicated textures. After making some graphics samples, I settled on using TVpaint software for the animation.

At the same time, I created 3D backgrounds in the film as a timesaving technique since I could make one scene in 3D and then render from as many camera angles as I wanted. However, before I finished the final 3D modeling, I had to make a 3D block for testing so I could find out whether I liked the ‘clean’ and ‘neat’ look of the 3D style. I found that this look differed too greatly from the simple opera stage style, so I only used the 3D backgrounds as references for actual background drawing.

![Background design test sample](image)

Figure 6: Background design test sample

**Character Design**

I did extensive research when I was doing my character design. I had to balance the visual impact that I desired for a character with the feasibility of achieving my goals during production. I consulted the Beijing Opera mask for the leading actors’ designs, especially because Beijing Opera has impressive
special makeups for female characters. In the early era of Beijing Opera, there were only actors but no actresses. Females were not allowed in shows or on stages. Only during the late Qing dynasty, around 1900, could females finally come to the stage. There were even female Beijing opera troupes that formed. Currently, even though there are many famous actresses in Qingyi, Huadan, Laodan (these are different age or types of female roles in Beijing Opera), the Beijing Opera is essentially an art for males.

![Dan actor in Beijing Opera](image)

*Figure 7: Dan actor in Beijing Opera*

*Picture from web*

Before a show, actors or actresses spend hours and hours in makeup. Audiences are able to distinguish the age, gender, and personalities for the actors or actresses by the types of facial makeup in operas. There are some specific rules in Dan makeup. Most of them attempt to cover any masculinity with a pink blush, thick eyeliner, thin eyebrows, and tiny but mellow and full lips. Audiences are generally unable to identify any original features of the face after makeup. This allows for multiple actors and actresses to perform as the same character seamlessly. In Dan makeup steps, there is one where a strip of cloth is applied for pulling eyes and eyebrows up that is tied on the
actor’s head. Another step is affixing a strand of fake hair on sideburns in order to shape the actor’s face into the public aesthetic of the times.

![Dan actress makeup](Picture from web)

In my characters’ designs, especially the main characters, I took some elements from makeup techniques in Beijing Opera. I imagined the makeups and masks like a 2D texture map applied on a 3D model face. With dramatic and romantic makeup, the actors’ expressions and their acting, like in opera, could come with their own unique enchantment.

After making sure that the art style and achievements in the character design were ready, I made lots of sketches. They looked good, however, not any of them was what I had in my mind.
I then tried to come up with the background style first and this made me able to truly feel my characters when I was designing them, since I felt I could bring more personality into the design language.
There are two main characters and two kinds of supporting characters in my film. The Emperor and the Concubine are the only two characters with faces and expressions. The other female servants and eunuchs look almost like puppets. There are many of them, but it does not matter who they are or what they do. They are with human bodies but without human feelings in this film.

Concubine

The Concubine is around 16 years old, with extremely long hair, cherry lips, and monolid, dark brown eyes. Seven years before, her family members were killed in front of her and that was the first time she saw the Emperor. The Emperor noticed her at this terrible moment, because of her beauty and gorgeous hair, and so she survived the killings. As a concubine, she does not talk much. Everyone around her behaves like puppets. They are only following orders.

Concubine Keywords: Silence, introversion, with magic powers (like the mutants in the X-Men film)

Emperor

The Emperor is around 50 years old. He wears golden-yellow imperial robes, and there is always a deep frown on his face as if he is constantly thinking about something. In the Feudal era, the emperor was called the “Son of God” and was deified. The common people treated emperors as a half human, half celestial being, even though they became emperor only because their forefathers won some wars.

Emperor Keywords: Brashness bordering on arrogance, ruthless, no respect, always giving orders

Background Design

My story mainly takes place in the Emperor’s palace. I used the famous Forbidden City as the reference, since it was built in the Ming dynasty, and
there were many new buildings and renovations to buildings that were made during the later Qing dynasty. I created a couple of different designs for the palace hallway, the interior of the palace, and the outside of the palace based off pictures and images from films depicting the Forbidden City. All the interior rooms in my thesis film were delicately re-invented and tastefully furnished based on the real pictures and film documentaries.

I visited the Forbidden City a few years back. The things that impressed me the most were the walls in the hallway and the ground tiles that are made of stone. The Cultural Relic Protection Department in China repaints most of the walls every ten years. There are some layers of past paintings along the edges of the walls that show through, kind of like tree rings that expose the age of a tree. The painted walls are battered by the wind and the rain, and exposed to summer and winter.
I decided to apply some paper textures, watermarks, or smudges on the backgrounds to show the traces of time. All the buildings in the palace attest well to the alternating of dynasties, changes of thrones and many mysteries. Many stories have been forgotten by people, as the faded-out paintings on the walls block out the history. But, there are still some marks and traces telling of the old days.

**Storyboarding**

Once I finalized the script, I began to think about storyboards. A storyboard is a way of planning the story of the animation in drawn pictures prior to making the animation itself. The storyboard helped me to finalize the camera angles and frame compositions, calculate the number of scenes and shots, establish different shots and make them consistent to convey the story.

I started storyboarding in December 2013, and I redid it in May 2014. I had an internship in spring 2013 and during that time I still thought about my thesis.
Then, after the first time I changed my script, I had to redo all the storyboards.

Actually, the new script made it easier for the storyboard. With a clear storyline and an adequately linked characters relationship diagram, I came up with the new storyboard and got approved by all committee members in a month.

I created 3D environment blocking for the environment setup and these were not used in the final storyboard. Because I cut some shots inside the palace, there are not many shots left showing the environment inside. Creating the 3D environment blocking was still a great way for me as a reference when drawing the backgrounds.

As a result, there are eight scenes and 45 shots in *Deadly Pleasure*. This is quite a lot for a thesis film. In the storyboard design, there were over 60 shots in the first version of the storyboard. It was really hard for me to make decisions on cuts. I had to make sure that the shots that would be cut would not impair the storytelling. Some shots to cut came into my mind at the very beginning, even before the final script came out.

Doing the shot subtractions was the first step in my storyboard polishing. The next step was adjusting all the shots left and trying to make every shot work in well-composed groups. Some inspiration for compositions for my thesis came from traditional Chinese paintings.

**Animatic**

I have separated the animatic part from the storyboard in this project because the timing and rhythm really matters in producing a good work. I worked with
the composer, who was not in Rochester, and not even in New York. I had not met him before, and since he was in California we had to work with a three-hour time difference. This caused some problems that I write about in detail in the *Music Composing and Sound FX* section of this paper.

I had to come up with a time-settled animatic for the composer to work with. After my storyboard was finished, I still did not know how many frames it would take for each shot, so I recorded every shot of the characters’ animation using the reference timings of my live action acting. Then I imported the footage into After Effects to remap the timing and made it ‘look like’ animation. This way of making an animatic was very useful, but also humorous. But, using the footage this way allowed me to produce a final animatic in a week. After meeting with my advisor, I sent the animatic to the composer and then began to animate each shot.

**PRODUCTION**

**Animation**

Many techniques have been applied to *Deadly Pleasure*, including cel animation, After Effects transition, and After Effects 3D. Different types of graphic motions require different processes to deal with, and each of them had specific conditions for use.

Different from traditional animation that re-draws everything frame by frame, cel animation innovatively divides an animation scene into separate layers and allows some parts of each frame to repeat from frame to frame in order to save labor and time. On the other hand, hand drawing gives more flexibility and creative space to animation, but it’s still the most time consuming method.
As an example, the first walking cycle has 10 key frames, and each of them repeats for 2-3 frames. The whole walking cycle repeats 10 times for a total of 220 frames.

**Background**

I calculated the number of backgrounds and scenes right after I finalized the storyboard. I created the character animations and the backgrounds separately in my thesis. I worked more than ten hours a day for three months on my thesis, and my schedule was pretty tight. In order to achieve the best efficiency, I switched between drawing backgrounds and character animations to keep myself from feeling bored of doing a single thing.

When dealing with perspective issues, collaborating with 3D would solve the problem. 3D software is able to test and preview the perspective immediately. However, on the other hand, 3D rendered images were too mechanical looking to match the rest of the hand-drawn animations. Therefore, to have both the accurate perspective and consistent visual style, 3D blocked backgrounds were modeled and rendered first. Then they were imported as references to create animation backgrounds in Photoshop. I separated backgrounds by object groups to many layers, and exported them to PNG files with a transparent channel. Then I listed them in After Effects with 3D layers, which could create the “fake 3D” stage. The animated sequences were set between the background layers.

**Coloring**

Color palette was the first thing I defined after finishing the background concept design. My thesis story happened during the night time. I was trying to simulate a cool palette with different shades. I started with Kuler - Adobe’s free web app by browsing themes created by others, and tried to create my
own palette. The app was great and user-friendly but it did not work for me. It seemed I dived too deep in color itself and forgot about the whole film. Then I decided to upload a picture which looked close to the color palette in my mind. After doing some adjustment in colors, I got the color palette for the first scene. I used the same way in other scenes too. It was much easier for me to improve a color palette rather than to create a brand new one.

Figure 13: The color palette for the first scene

I colored the film in TVPaint directly. There were a few adjustments in After Effects, but mainly I did all the coloring in TVPaint. I allocated most of my color work to my undergraduate colleagues Qina Chen, Molly Sotak, Ginda Sun, and Miranda Sider. I really appreciate their help. I should also say thanks to Mary Barnard, the office secretary in SOFA, who forwarded my recruiting email to all undergraduate students, who responded quickly within a week. I organized their names by the kind of work. Molly Sotak, Ginda Sun, and Miranda Sider were junior students majoring in animation, and only one of them knew how to use TVPaint. So, I scheduled a meeting for training after I decided who the assistants were. I came up with a list of specifications, and wrote down any requirements and set up tips, like brush settings, for instance. The students' work was very helpful, but there were some shots that needed to be re-worked. Fortunately, I still had enough time to fix these shots.

**Rendering**

In my thesis, there were three renders in my working process. After I finished the animating and coloring for characters, I exported image sequences as PNG
files due to its lossless nature. I did some color correction and adjustments in After Effects then put these sequences into the compositions with the backgrounds. I rendered the full film with credits as a PNG sequence, in order to add music in Adobe Premiere.

The final rendering settings were based on the requirements for thesis screening. All the information is listed below.

Title:  *Deadly Pleasure*
Format:  A 2D animation film
Length:  5:00
Display Resolution:  1280 x 720 pixels
Aspect Ratio:  16: 9
Frame Rate:  24 fps
Audio Channels:  Stereo
Sample Rate:  48 kHz
Used Softwares:  Adobe Photoshop, After Effects, Premiere, TVPaint

**Composition**

I used Adobe After Effects in my thesis for the animatic, layout movements, compositing animations and backgrounds together, color adjustments, and highlight effects and credits.

I finished animation layers and background individually, so the first thing I did in After Effects was combining the character animations with the background layers. Some color adjustments were also did in After Effects. I decreased the contrast of some backgrounds to make audience focus on the characters animation more. The tools I used most in color adjustments were
under Effect-Color correction-Brightness & Contrast, and Effect-Color correction-Curves.

My thesis story takes place in the nighttime. There was no daylight in any scene. The lighting fixtures in this film were moonlight and candlelight. I tried to make this film in an enigmatic and quiet mood, so there was a lot backlight and side surface shots from the beginning to the end. Under these situations, I came up with a good solution for the characters’ lighting part. The character animations were exported as PNG file sequences with alpha channel. After the import, I replicated each animation layer three times. I translated the first layer horizontally for a few pixels. The overlap of the top two layers was dimmed to be the part of this layer’s shadow.

POST-PRODUCTION

Music Composing and Sound FX

Adding music was almost the last step in my film. Music plays a significant role in Deadly Pleasure, especially because there is no narration or text in the film. Before I set up the stage art stylization, I totally had no idea about the music. The function of the music was to evoke an emotional reaction and create a certain ambiance to promote the film. The theme music was composed and recorded by Haiyi Liu, a newly graduated music student from UCLA. He is a very talented composer, even though he became one of my biggest challenges near the end of my thesis.

I had not met Liu before we started working together, although he had been a Facebook friend for around two years. I asked him if he was interested in composing for my film in the first semester of the thesis project. When we both agreed to collaborate we began to explore appropriate music styles and instruments. I updated my progress to him weekly and sometimes sent him
some Chinese music clips as references. After several meetings on Skype, we made an agreement about the style of the music. It would be similar in idea to the Beijing Opera and its simple stage sets, with strong rhythm but only a few musical instruments. He began to work on the music after I sent him the final animatic. We both worked on the same timeline and we worked individually. He sent me the final music two weeks before the screening deadline so I could have time to fix any problems with the visuals and do some adjustment before the screening.

Everything went smoothly until a few weeks before the screening due date. When I asked the composer if he could send me any music drafts or get some feedbacks, he did not reply my email. After disappearing for about 4 weeks, he sent me some music edits. It seems the final one. At that moment, it was almost one week before the due date. To be honest, I was a little pissed off. In the final moments of my thesis film, I spent a whole weekend working in the graduate animation lab and finished the film the day before screenings, complete with the music! Unfortunately, because of finishing so close to the deadline I was unable to get any changes on the background music from my colleagues and faculty committee. But fortunately, the music worked great with my film. I did the final timing alignment in After Effects for my animation with time remapping. I cannot adjustment the music clip, so I have to do some adjustments in order to make my animation perfectly fit the music. Normally, music always fits for the imagery. In my case, it could work when the music cannot be changed.

**Final Adjustments**

Final adjustment is the last and very important step in a film production. There are always some issues that remain just before the release of a film and certain tweaks can make the film better. My final changes included
composition, camera shots adjustments, color and light tunings, sound volume adjustments for exaggerations, and inserting shots. I also remapped a few timings and corrected some frames that were not transitioning smoothly in the final film.

**REFLECTIONS**

The development of my thesis project was a great learning experience. Although it was not my first animation project, I had not spent so much time working on one film before. Based on the audience response to the film at its premiere in the SOFA screenings, *Deadly Pleasure* still has potential for improvement in the release version of the project. For instance, adding a few more scenes to deliver the main idea for more clarity, polishing character animation for more smoothness, and adding more background details, were a few suggestions from the audience.

**Screening**

I got some responses from the audiences and professors in my SOFA screening. Some of the ideas were from the perspectives I had never thought about. I really appreciate these suggestions and they offered other points of view for my film which were extremely helpful to improve my film after screening.

The questions about the film were focusing on 2 things. One was why the girl wants to revenge. The audience coming up with this question showed that I should do something more to deliver the revenge idea in my film. Maybe adding another piece of memory image could fix it. The other question was why the eunuchs and guards did not have faces or expressions. They did look like wearing blank masks. The reason I designed the blank face was
mentioned in the character design part. After I explained the reason the audience got it quickly, so I do not think that part should be changed.

**Learning**

I gained a deeper understanding of 2D animation during the development of the character animations. This is not the first time I went through a whole process of 2D animation from the character design to the final compositing, but this thesis project impressed me the most amongst all the past projects I have worked on. I improved my communication skills, gained more experience in working with a team, and my technical skills were enhanced. I learned that to create a mature film that offers enjoyable visual entertainment and helpful cultural information, plenty of patience and hard work are required throughout the whole process.

**Future Considerations**

*Deadly Pleasure* will be published online and submitted to different film festivals and design competitions. In the meantime, I continue to refine the design and animation to improve its visual effectiveness and overall success.

**Challenges and Triumphs**

**Time Management**

Time management has always been a problem for the artist, especially for animators. I could always tell the deadline for each class by the population in the animation lab. During my thesis there was time management problems too.

The first thing that broke my timeline was having to redo the script. Before the first committee meeting after my initial proposal, I found out my thesis script was out of control. I did not know how I could finish the storyboard, since there were too many ideas and elements I tried to put into that story. Some of
my friends told me there was too much information in the story that might distract me from the main storyline.

It took me a few weeks to think about whether I should give up the “finished” script and storyboard. After I made the decision to make a big change in the story the original timeline needed to be revised and my schedule became very tight.

I don’t wish to imply that other students should not change their story or script, but what I am trying to say is that if there is any issue or sticking place in their story they would better off finding it out and fixing it as soon as possible. Starting over happens in film production. But, it is better to find out any problems early and not let it get so far into production that it risks not finishing the film at all or making a bad film. For a realistic timeline, I would recommend leaving more time for the idea and script.

Subcontracting Work

In my thesis, I did most of the work, except for the music scoring and some coloring. I recruited volunteers for coloring in TVPaint. The first recommendation I have is that if you plan to recruit volunteers, you should do it at the beginning of the semester. My volunteers sent me emails to delay the coloring schedule because they were busy, and this altered my thesis plan a little bit. I pretty much understand that they were probably very busy on their own projects, but it delayed my whole process. My composer also disappeared for half a month, and I did not know how I could find him. It is better to leave more time or have a backup plan for all subcontracting work. Anything can happen, but these are not what I can control. Compared with these pressures, working more than ten hours a day was not that bad. At least I knew everything was under control.
REFERENCES

APPENDIX

Proposal

The Avenger

Chunhui Bao
MFA Animation Thesis proposal
School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute of Technology
May 8, 2013

Background

The story takes place in the Qing Dynasty in China, after the emperor Yongzheng ascended to the throne in 1723. Manchu nationals, "Man" became the highest class in the empire. The new emperor was so suspicious of the Chinese ethnic groups within the empire, like the Han group, which was the largest ethnic group. All the officials worked hard to become a Chinese official and be trusted by the emperor. When she becomes the emperor's...
Title: *The Avenger* (working title)
Producer: Chunhui Bao
Adviser: Stephanie Maxwell
Medium: 2D Animation
Time: 3 mins

The girl witnesses her father's murder by soldiers of Emperor Yongzheng. After 10 years the girl is brought to the emperor's palace. One night while the emperor and the concubine are together in bed, an assassin takes the emperor's brother's place. Before the assassin is able to kill the emperor, the girl uses her own needle to stab him.

**Background**

This story takes place in the Qing Dynasty in China, after the Emperor Yongzheng ascended to the throne in 1723. Minority nationality "Man" became the highest class in the hierarchy system. The new emperor was so suspicious of the diverse ethnic groups within the empire, like the Han group, which was the largest ethnic group. So, he began a mass political persecution campaign of the Han group officials. Most of the time the males in the family would be killed and any females would be sent to be the slaves of the emperor.

In this work, a girl's father is one of the victims in the mass political persecution by Emperor Yongzheng, and he is killed. The girl is sent away and trained to become a concubine. It becomes the goal of the girl to work hard to become a chosen concubine and be selected by the emperor. When she becomes the emperor's concubine she can then avenge the murder of her father.
Synopsis

A six-year-old girl witnesses her father's murder by soldiers of Emperor Yongzheng. The girl is enslaved and trained to be a concubine. After 10 years the girl is brought into the emperor's palace. One night while the emperor and the concubine are together in bed, an assassin enters the emperor's bedroom. Before the assassin is able to kill the emperor, the girl strangles the emperor using her own long braided hair.

Story

In a garden outside a small country house in China in the 16th century, a man Liu (age 40) is planting seeds into the ground. His daughter Qui (age 6) stands next to him handing him one seed at a time. Liu's wife Tao is nearby hanging laundry out in the sun. Suddenly, horses carrying soldiers and the Emperor Yongzheng arrive at the house. The soldiers grab the man and tie him up. He is set before the emperor. Qui runs and hides in a large bamboo basket. Her mother covers the basket with her body, but from inside the basket Qui can see what is happening outside. Qui hears the emperor proclaim, "Off with his head!" and the emperor kills Liu. A soldier pulls Tao from atop the basket, then kicks the basket over and Qui rolls out. Her clothes are torn and on her shoulder there is a plum flower shaped birthmark. When Qui rises off the ground and then faces the emperor, the emperor approaches her. He takes his bloody sword and puts the point to Qui's face. In a sudden move he cuts off
Qiu’s hair bun, and it unravels into its long dark braid on the ground. Qiu is terrified and the emperor laughs at her. The emperor returns to his horse and rides away. The soldiers force Qui and Tao onto their horses and take them away from their home.

Ten years later, in the bedroom of the emperor at the emperor’s palace, a eunuch holds a tray on which there are many small wood pieces with different names on them. The emperor chooses one wood piece, hands it to the eunuch, and then walks away. Later that evening the wood piece is hanging on a wall outside a bathroom where a concubine is taking a bath. She has very long hair and she steps out of the bath carefully. She braids her and creates a special bun atop her head.

It is evening time in the palace and there are two eunuchs carrying the quilt-covered concubine with the special bun into the emperor’s bedroom. They leave the concubine on the bed and then exit the bedroom and stand guard at the door outside.

Later on, suddenly one of the eunuchs draws a dagger from his sleeve and kills the other eunuch and a guard nearby. The eunuch enters the bedroom quietly and approaches close to the bed of the emperor. The emperor and the concubine are quietly making love. The eunuch raises the dagger above the emperor with the intention of killing him. Suddenly, the emperor screams in ecstasy. The assassin jumps back and knocks over a table. The sound surprises the emperor and he calls loudly for the palace guards. The assassin rushes behind a closet. A guard rushes into the bedroom, past the dead eunuch and guard outside in the hall. The assassin
throws the dragger and kills the guard. The assassin then rushes to the bed and finds the emperor dead! Around the neck of the emperor is wound a long length of a woman's braided hair. The concubine is gone.

A few years later, Qiu feeds pigs outside in a yard of a small country house. She holds a baby in one arm. The baby is playing with her mother’s long pigtail. Nearby, a little boy (age 5) is playing with a ball. A man, Qiu’s husband, comes back from work in the nearby field. The boy sees his father and runs towards him. The man picks up the boy and swings him in the air. Qiu comes to her husband and they stand close together. The little boy takes his mother’s long braid and wraps it around the family as they stand with their faces shining in the warm sunlight.
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Film stills

Deadly Pleasure Image 1

Deadly Pleasure Image 2
Deadly Pleasure Image 3

Deadly Pleasure Image 4
Deadly Pleasure Image 7

Deadly Pleasure Image 8
Deadly Pleasure Image 23