FuXi

TungTe Tsao

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FuXi

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

MFA Imaging Arts/Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
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A computer animated movie by TungTe Tsao
Original Music by Tom Schneller

Length: 4 Minutes 14 Seconds
Color

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My supportive and inspirational classmates, friend, and co-worker:
Tom Schneller
Hiroki Sato
Yumi Kim
Jarod Su
Nicholas G. Baish

To these and all others who helped me get there, thank you. I could finish it because of your help.
The Abstract

This story was happened around Qin dynasty in China. This era in China was full of the mystery stories or myths. There were an emperor and a Taoist in the story, and both of them were trying to find a way to be deathless.
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01. Pre-Production
The Concept

Life is full of unpredictable things. Sometimes, we go to a shopping mall with our family. You are the only one who doesn’t have any idea what you want to buy, but also you are the only one who find something they like. This was what sort of it happened when I found what I wanted to do with my master’s thesis.

I saw a Japanese live action movie, Dororo, when I was doing my two-quarter film. It is talking about a man who doesn’t have his own fifty organs in his body which were taken by fifty demons. He begins his journey to kill those demons in order to take his own organs back. The time period of this movie is Muromachi era in Japan. I love the art direction of that movie which is full of mystery and traditional style in it. So, I decided to do the similar style for my thesis.

After deciding the style of my thesis film, I tried to find, for reference, some traditional Chinese music and the original soundtrack of Dororo. Listening to the music that I found helped me to imagine what my film would look like, what the characters’ emotions would be, and what the atmosphere of my film would look like. Then, I thought what kind of the story I want to convey to the audience. This was the most difficult part of my film because I wanted the American audience to understand the story which is about the traditional Chinese thought. I decided to use the action to tell my story instead of using dialogue because
body language is a more international and easier means for people to understand.

In doing some research about the time period I found references as to what I wanted my film background to be. Then, I choose the era before Qin dynasty (around 221 BC) in China because there were lots of the mystery stories or myths during that time, and there were many emperors who tried to be deathless. So, I thought it was a good era to work within.

Treatment

Once I got the concept of my film, the story background, and the visual style. The next thing I needed to do is decided how to make my story more fluid and understandable to an American audience.

In the beginning, I hadn’t decided what the personalities of my character were. I thought about my concept again and again, and realized that the emperors in the early Chinese history were trying to do the
same thing that we are doing now --- using the science or medicine against the nature. In my mind, it is ridiculous because we are not god, and everything in this world has its own balance rules they need to follow. From this point of view, I think a tragedy ending and two selfish characters for my film were necessary and better than any other style of storytelling. Now, the only thing I needed to do was make the story procedure clear and reasonable.

My story is about two men who are trying to find the way to become deathless, but no way exist, so both of them die in the end. Based on my research, I decided that one of my characters is emperor, and the other is Taoist who is trying to find the way to become deathless in the early China.

When I was finished with my first draft of the script, I discussed with my classmates and felt surprised that the gap between Eastern and Western culture was much widener than I thought. There are still lots of things that Americans couldn’t understand. I went to see my chair twice a week, and she showed me some Chinese animations that Americans can understand. After watching the animations, I realized that I put many traditional Chinese materials which are common sense for Chinese in my script, but not so for Americans. In order to refine my story, I drew the beatboards which were the most important shots in my story on five pieces of paper, and used them to make the body of my story clearer. I also tried to change some of the traditional Chinese materials into something Chinese that Americans already knew about. Finally, I got feedback that most Americans could understand what my story is about.
Storyboard

After using beatboards to build the body of the story, the most important next step was drawing the storyboards which could connect the each beatboard to make my story complete and clearer. Storyboards also play the important roles of the storytelling, blocking of the stage, and setting the position of the camera. If there was something wrong with the animation, it was easy to see the problem. I drew the storyboards on post-it notes which helped me change the order of the shots and the sequence easily. To decipher the different locations in my storyboards, I used the blue post-it note for my indoor shots, and yellow one for my outside shots.

The animatic is a motion storyboard. Because it is a kind of simple animation, timing is everything. First, I listened to the music I found. Second, I used Adobe After Effects to combine the storyboards with music. Finally, I adjusted the timing of the images appearance to match the musical rhythm. It saved me lots of time, and let me know the parts where I needed to focus.
02. Production
Character Design

In the beginning, my characters were a little bit realistic which my favorite style is. During a meeting with my adviser, I found that the realistic style could make the problem that audience might not be able to tell the characters apart easily, and couldn’t feel the characters’ personality by their look. For this reason, the adviser suggested that I should search pictures of animals, and try to make my characters have more of the animal-like look, especially for my main character---FuXi.

Following what she said, I searched animal pictures, for example, pictures like the cobra and fox. Then, I tried to draw different style of FuXi. Some were cobra-like, and some were fox-like. Considering the ending, FuXi turned into a snake god, I decided to use a cobra-like FuXi to be my final design.

The most difficult character to model was the emperor. Because my 2-D art work for the emperor was too graphic, there were some details that were hard to create in 3-D world. For example, in my original design of emperor, the corners of his mouth were drooping which moved weird when he was talking. I kept refining my emperor model shape, and changed some details. In the end, the emperor model was the best model in my film and looked more nature when he was talking.
Environment Design

Environment design was the biggest challenge in the film. “It is not a realistic style film, and should be dream-like or myth-like atmosphere.” I told to myself. Upon reflection, I knew I didn’t want to have a photorealistic background, so I looked for several pieces of Chinese ink and wash painting. It was hard work because Chinese ink and wash paintings are very graphic. If I didn’t do that well, the background could have looked very rigid and terrible.

In order to work my background well in 3-D, I also searched some Chinese scenery photos which looked like ink-and-wash-painting style and saw what was in common. Then, I found that the cloud could be an important ingredient which would make my background look more ink-and-wash-painting-like. The reason is because there are lots of white spaces in ink and wash painting which could match the result that the cloud, fog, or air made—-a little bit blur and whiter for the far-away mountain or object.

After knowing that, I tried to create a good-quality sky and cloud. It was the first time that I used fluid effect in 3D software, and asked one of my committee, Duane Palyka, to teach me more about fluid and particle effects. In the end, I was very happy what I got.
Animation

I always have the difficulty on the timing of actions. Every time I finished animating a shot, and thought that there was no problem with it, but it always looked slow when I watched it a few days later. Acting and animating are the soul of character animation, but they are also the parts that I was not good at.

In my thesis film, acting and animating played very important roles because there are lots of shots which need to show the characters’ personality, purpose, and emotion. I couldn’t exaggerate their body language otherwise it would be funny, but if the action or facial expression was slight, then audience wouldn’t be able to feel the passion or the cool in the characters’ heart. Acting and animating occupied 50% in whole of my thesis schedule.

In the beginning, I did 3D blocking which helped me to decide where I could put the camera and make sure the characters’ action were OK. Second, I used those blocking files to do the pose-animation which are key frames in the animation that don’t have any in-between frames in it used for testing the timing of the action. It helped me a lot to improve my biggest problem I mentioned in the beginning. Third,
I put the in-between frames and refined the timing of action. Completion meant that I had just finished the rough animation. In the end, I added the facial expression and improved the timing of the action. Although I finished all the acting and animating parts, I still tried to fix some small problems like walk cycle, and make my characters movement less robotic. I think my thesis film is my best film for acting and animating of the characters.
03. Post-Production
Editing

Because I was doing my 2-D storyboards and 3-D animatic very carefully, there was no serious problem when I did editing. I asked one of my friends who is a live-action student in RIT to help me check the shots, and followed some of his suggestions to modify my camera positions. Overall, everything went smoothly in editing.

Sound Effect and Music

Usually, I do sound effect first, and then add the music in later. This time, I met with a composer first, and gave him my rough animation. He had some good ideas after watching my film, so I got the music very fast. The composer did a wonderful job on music, and added some atmosphere music in my important shots. When I put his music in FinalCut and watched my film together, the atmosphere music and jingle sound he added just matched what the sound effect I want in those shot. It saved me lots of time.
on finding the special sound effects, and I just used his music to be my main sound effects in those shots.

Even when I got the wonderful music for my thesis, I still needed to add the sound effects for most of the shots. My friend who helped me on editing worked the sound effect mix with me. I discussed with him what sound I wanted to include, he offered many suggestions. For example, I want to put the foot step sounds when my characters were walking, but he told me that it isn’t normal to hear the foot step sounds in the day time and it might be distractive. This is the first time I realized that everything I thought was normal to put in the soundtrack might not be true. I needed to observe the sounds we create in our lives in order to make my film have a more appropriate sound design.

I learned many things in sound mixing this time, and knew how much good sound could improve the quality of the film. Animation is just like the main ingredient in a meal, if we get the appropriate music and sound in the correct proportions, we create the exact right taste for the meal or film.
04. Reflections
The Screening

Every time I show a film in a screening, I am always nervous. Not only I need to have a presentation, but also might have technical problems with my film. For example, when I was exporting my film to the DV cam, everything was going well in the computer and I saw no problem at all when I watched my film through the TV, but there always might be the problem with soundtrack, image, or problem with the player in screening. So, now I can relax after my film has shown, and everything went OK with the image and sound. I was lucky that I didn’t have any trouble when I was showing my one-quarter, two-quarter, and even my thesis. I have to admit that there are many flaws in my thesis because I set the low quality when I was rendering. My files are very heavy and time consuming to render an image, so I decided to render low quality in order to show my film on time. I know getting the flaws in my film is inevitable, and tried to make the damage as low as possible. I am glad that the flaws are not so bad when I was screening.

I was happy to hear that many audience are enjoyed my film and wanted to see more. I was also glad to hear some criticisms because it is impossible to make all audience love a works. The most important thing is to make myself improve the skill. New work is always better than previous one, so it’s hard to do a perfect work, especially from the technical aspect.
Conclusion

After my nocturnal style of life during the one-quarter and two-quarter films, I decided to create something simpler for my thesis in order to have conventional life style and easier time. After finishing my thesis film, I would like to say I was wrong. It was not easy at all. Although it was not easy, I though what I learned during the progress was greater than my previous films. It was the first time I collaborated with a composer for my film, and had to try to explain what kind of the music I would like to have. We kept weekly communication until my film was done. I learned to do the most important shot or the shot which the characters have many interactions first in order to create good character personality. I really thank all of my friends who helped me on rendering, modeling, and sound effects. I realized that I wouldn’t have finished a good film without their talented help.
Appendix A: Original Thesis Proposal
Fu-Xi
Thesis Proposal
3D Animation

TungTe Tsao

Approved by

________________________
Nancy Beiman, Chair
School of Film and Animation

Date
_____________________
Title: Fu-Xi
Format: 3D computer animation
Start date: March 2007
End date: May 2008
Running time: 4 min
Adviser: Nancy Beiman

Brief:
A wizard finds a way to make him be deathless.

Synopsis:
On the top of the mountains surrounded by the sea of clouds, there is a very gallant gate and grand tower. Between the gate and tower, there is a huge three-legged cooking vessel. Inside the grand tower, there is a wizard whose name is Fu-Xi. He is sitting in front of the desk and reading a scroll [On the scroll are secret directions with pictures of a dead Emperor and a god]. A few minutes later, he shows an evil smile, stands up and says:

_I need just one more ingredient!_ (We see the picture of the Emperor)

Fu-Xi makes a silver powder ball with the magic tools. When he finishes making the ball, he heard the footsteps outside of the grand tower. Fu-Xi walks outside and finds that there is a well-dressed man who is walking toward the grand tower. Fu-Xi kneels down. The well-dressed man hints that Fu-Xi could stand up by waving his hand. Fu-Xi stands up and says:

_My Emperor, this is a magic pill of immortal._

Fu-Xi takes out the silver powder ball from his pocket and gives that to the Emperor very respectfully. The Emperor takes the ball, looks at it for a while, and then swallows the ball. Then, the Emperor walks toward the way shown by the wizard, and Fu-Xi walks after the Emperor.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

They walk to the top of the hill near the three-legged vessel. Fu-Xi waves his hand and the cover of the three-legged vessel opens automatically. Suddenly, the Emperor looks pained and there are lots of purple spots on his face. Fu-Xi shows an evil smile. The Emperor walks tipsily and falls into the three-legged vessel. Fu-Xi laughs. After a few
seconds, the clouds on the top of the three-legged vessel become circular. A huge beam from the sky shoots through the circular clouds and envelops the three-legged vessel. When the beam disappears, Fu-Xi jumps, stands on the edge of three-legged vessel and says:

*I win now be immortal! That was the last ingredient!*

He kneels down, spoons up the brew in the three-legged vessel with his right hand and drinks. Something happens to Fu-Xi’s body. His waist and below becomes a snake’s tail. He looks at his new body with joy. Then Fu-Xi flies toward the sun. Suddenly, the Emperor’s face shows on the left side of Fu-Xi’s chest. Fu-Xi feels surprised. The purple spots on the Emperor’s face transfer to Fu-Xi’s body and spread. Fu-Xi feels pain. The scaling on his body falls off piece by piece and his left chest starts to disappear. He begins to fall when the lower part of his body completely disappears. Fu-Xi feels more and more pain and screams. In the end, he disappears when he falls into the sea of clouds, and the echo of his scream still can be heard in the mountain.

— The End—

**Approach:**
This film will be produced in 3D. I will use *Autodesk MAYA* to do all 3D stuff (ex. modeling, lighting, rigging, animating……) and *Adobe PhotoshopCS2* to finish all textures. *Final7cut pro* and *Soundtrack* will be used when I am going to edit my film.
"Fu-Xi" Beatboard:

1.

2.
"Fu-Xi" Budget

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Contingency $500.00
Appendix B: Original Storyboards
Shot 051-A

Shot 053

Shot 053-A

Shot 052

Shot 054-A

B

Shot 053-A

B
The End
Appendix C: Color Prints
Title of Thesis: Fu-Xi

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