5-1-2002

Food chain

Eunsoo Kim
food chain

BY
Eunsoo Kim

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

MFA Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
May, 2002

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Howard Lester
Professor
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TITLE OF THESIS: *Food Chain*

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Signature

May 17, 2002

Date
Thanks to All

When I look back on the day when I first turned on Maya, I felt it was going to be incredible challenge for me because even if I didn’t have any background in animation. Honestly, I remember I was very nervous at the time. I came here to Rochester as a live action film student. However, that uncertain feeling become an enjoyable feeling that is strong enough to make me an animator and finish my thesis movie as an animator. But it was very tough time for me, if I didn’t have the support from all the people whom I am grateful. Even I can’t imagine my life in here without them.

I really appreciate all my classmates, my committee members, Howard Lester, Skip Battaglia, Duane Palyka, my parents, and especially my lovely wife, Sujeong.

In terms of my thesis movie, it has been an amazing experience for me that I spent almost one year with one project. During those days, I tried a lot, failed a lot, but finally I learned a lot. I certainly believe it’s going to be big turning point in my life. I am really satisfied with what I did and want to share this moment with all my friends and associates.

Thank you, all.
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1. Introduction

Since my undergraduate major was Korean Language and Literature, I have been always interested in making and telling a story. After graduating from Dongguk University in Seoul, Korea, I decided to show the stories as a filmmaker, so I applied to the RIT film/animation department to make my dream come true. Animation was not my main interest until I took the first animation seminar class here in September 1999. I came here as a live action film student. After I was introduced to animation, I was easily fascinated by it. Most of all, the huge potential of the 3D world led me to begin studying animation. I started a little bit late, but after spending three years giving it my best effort, I can finally present my thesis movie.

I wanted to make my thesis movie in a simple and funny cartoon style, like old Warner Brothers films, so that I could concentrate on character animation. I designed my characters and all backgrounds to look funny and simple. I also made my story to fit the style. It is not realistic, but I thought it could give me a chance to present character animation. When I look back on my previous two animated movies, I mainly adhered to storytelling first. It seemed like a live action film style. I was partly satisfied with that, but I didn’t have enough opportunity to show character animation through those movies, which is the most important part for an animator, so I decided to make my thesis movie cartoon in style.

It took me almost one year to finish my thesis movie ‘food chain’. During that time, everything from the original story to modeling and texturing, changed. Whenever I decided to make a lot of changes, I felt
very stressed, but on the other hand my story was growing stronger. I think those changes were an essential process to develop my thesis and keep me interested. However, since the final story line of ‘food chain’, is totally different from my original proposal ‘men on the water’, I feel I need to mention the reason why I changed the story before I discuss ‘food chain’.

The original story of my thesis movie ‘men on the water’, has the same basic premise: a greedy man can never get his goal easily as does my final thesis movie ‘food chain’. However, the story line is totally different. My original story was about a strange bird and greedy people.

One day, a strange-looking bird comes to a village. Whenever the bird sits down on a house, the houses sink, until there is only one house left. The last man fights with the bird, but he doesn’t recognize the reason that the houses were sinking. The reason is their greed, not the bird. Finally, he moves to a nearby island with his all stuff. However, as soon as he arrives on the island, the island also begins to sink.

I loved the idea of ‘men on the water’, but I thought that showing their persistence about their precious objects was not the best way to display their greed, so I decided to change and develop the idea. One day, I saw a documentary TV program about a strange world. The people catch fish using a bird. After the bird catches a fish, they take the fish from its throat and make it work again and again for them. That was one of the most selfish behaviors that I’ve ever seen. However, I could develop a new idea from the TV program. Finally, ‘food chain’ was born. I could keep the same concept ‘greedy men can never get their goal
easily’, and the same characters, but I changed the way to express greed by showing a relationship between a bird which is a fish catching slave and a man who wants to get fish from the bird. I thought this story was going to be more effective, and it gave me renewed confidence.

2. Characters

• Z

I started to make my characters first. Since Z is one of my main characters, I concentrated on him first. He is somewhat aggressive looking, foolish and greedy. He is good with a slingshot, and keeps harassing the bird X through the whole movie. I gave him a big nose, sharp eyes, thin arms and legs, but a big belly for him. Those intended designs were a very effective way to make him a foolish-greedy man. To concentrate on character animation with him, I decided to make him bald.

• X

X is my other main character. Z forces it to work as a fishing tool for Z by force. Because of X’s fishing job, I modeled it like a pelican which has a big mouth. It has hand-like wings with four fingers to express its body language sometimes. It should be more foolish than Z, and the weakest character in
my movie, so I emphasized its unsymmetrical face and made big eyes, a reddish color for its body, silly eyebrows, and a long neck. I think those elements were very helpful to make it look as foolish as I intended.

• Y
I modeled Y imagining something between an eagle and a seagull. Since the characteristics of Y are intelligence and strength, I made it look brave and sharp. Giving Y big and strong wings, I could make it look stout. And I put sunglasses on it to make it look smart and weird. It also has hand-like wings, too. It comes into the movie as a strong character, but finally turns out to be a miserable victim.

• M
M is an important support character at the end of my movie. It looks like a silly and normal fish, but suddenly changes into a horrible monster. I gave it some sharp teeth and a big mouth to foreshadow his last action, and its big and separated eyes helped it look silly.

• Fs
Other fish in my movie are female. They are just food for other characters. Since they are not such important characters in my movie, I simply modified M’s body shape to just make them look different. Their basic structure is almost the same, but I put totally different colors and textures on them.
3. Story Line

• Opening
When the movie starts, an island springs suddenly from the sea and all props such as the house, pot, table, easy chair, and so on falls from the sky. The main character Z also falls down, too. After he recovers his senses, he finds a slingshot and catches the bird X to make it a fish-catching slave for him. I set up this opening shot not only to introduce my story but also to show the audience that my background is imaginary space. I expected that the audience would accept easily what would happen later in my movie by seeing this unbelievable creation procedure of an island in a short time.

• X’s job
M finds a female fish while swimming. It approaches the female, but suddenly the bird X catches the female fish. M is surprised, but tries to find another female fish. However, the same situation happens again and again. M gets mad so he decides to beat the bird X but fails. In this beginning shot, I wanted to describe the bird X’s job, catching the fish for the man Z, and show the relationship between the fish and the bird X by simply repeating the catching and reacting actions.
• **Greedy Z**

The bird X is floating and watching the man Z who is snoring in his chair. The bird X smiles and tries to swallow the fish. As soon as the bird X tries to swallow a fish, a bell sound rings in the air. The bird X gets flustered and scared. The bird X tries to swallow the fish but is dragged by the man Z. There is the bird X at the end of the fishing rod. The man Z grabs its neck and torments the bird to get the fish and eat it. The bird X is in pain but he smiles. The man Z kicks the bird X’s butt. He throws a stone to make the bird X dive into the water to get another fish. The main point of this scene is to describe Z’s greed. Though he already ate some fish, he never supplies any fish for the bird X. I tried to show his greed by showing his exaggerated and ruthless actions toward the bird X.

• **Three different ideas**

The bird X finds a flying bird Y that looks very imposing and brave. The bird X waves its wings to get some help. The imposing Y spots the waving and sees the man Z. The bird Y thinks for a moment. While the bird X is waving, the man Z watches what happens and smiles strangely and rushes to his house. He hurriedly looks for something to catch another bird. Finally, he grabs a slingshot and a restraining and enslaving neck-ring for another bird. He aims for the bird Y. The bird Y frowns and rushes up to him very fast. Finally, the man Z releases the slingshot and the stone flies at the bird Y, but misses. The man Z falls down to the ground and the bird Y smacks the
man Z. In this scene, the three characters have different intentions even though they are in same situation. I had thought to put in a couple of shots with ‘thought balloons' to indicate the characters’ intentions, but decided to show their facial expressions to give the audience an opportunity to imagine the next step.

• Same situation

The man Z and the bird X are swimming together smiling. They find a couple of fish. The one is a new female fish and the other is the previous male fish. The two fish are trying to swim away but the bird X catches the female fish easily. As soon as the bird X gets the female fish, the infuriated male fish rushes to the bird X. The man Z catches the male fish with a big mouth and smiles. There is a bell sound, again. I intended to show a small twist in this step. The bird Y has both of them catch fish. I tried to describe this strange situation showing the man Z and the bird X’s job. I thought the audience could be curious about the bird Y.

• Surprising result

The bird Y pulls the line and wants to get from the man Z. He opens his mouth with pain. As soon as the man Z does so, the male fish suddenly gets bigger and quickly eats the bird Y. The bird X and the man Z are frozen. The male fish swallows the bird Y. The male fish is taking the female from the bird X’s mouth and they dive
into the sea. They look at each other and cheer, but the man Z smiles and tries to catch the bird X again. I wanted put some final twist to punish the greed, but at the same time, I tried to show the unchangeable human appetite.

Throughout this movie, I tried to present a simple and funny story that contained a deeper meaning. The mean nature of some of the characters showed some of the realities we live with. One of intentions of my film was that power could change everyone’s situation. The weakest could defeat the strongest in a strange world. I also wanted to demonstrate the destructive power of greed. The two points made in the film worked well with each other to create a chaotic, surprising end to the film. I hoped the audience could have an opportunity to think about a definition of greed after watching my movie.

4. Technical Solutions

• Modeling

characters
I made my characters have a similar cartoon style, so I exaggerated some parts of my characters to make them look funny and attractive. However, I didn’t forget that my characters should look believable. Thanks to the subdivision tools of Maya, I could easily build up very smooth and natural forms with a similar style.

background
When I started to make my backgrounds, I just imagined a small desert island. Then, I asked myself that, if there was one man, what kind of stuff would he want to make? All the props came from that idea. I made a
thatched house, cage, shower stand, table, bed, easy chair, and so on which he could make by himself in a desert island. Most of those materials are wood to make it believable and look very native with using small data.

For the undersea background, I wanted to avoid being empty while keeping the same style. I just put some rocks, seaweed, clams, starfish, etc. Whenever I needed to duplicate those objects, I used instance option for them to reduce the file size and scaled them up and down.

props
Some of the props are important in my movie such as the slingshot and the neck-ring. To keep them same style, I designed simply, considering their functions.

Most of all, I concentrated on making everything simple but keeping it in uniform style. Using the simple subdivision tool of Maya, I think mostly it worked very well.

- Setting Up

characters
Generally, what I want to do is to keep the file size small, but find effective ways to control my characters because it’s a personal work. I kept trying to make it simple throughout my whole procedure. The unique point of my characters is using clusters to animate their faces and bodies. I didn’t adhere to using only blendshapes, which is the traditional way to morph a character’s face and body. I put some clusters on certain parts to control each exact part easily. This was very effective and helped to reduce my file size and to create as many different shapes as I wanted. Using proper set driven keys, I can make simple attributes to control my characters effectively. For example, I put a breathing attribute that scaled some
joints up and down to give my characters constant change capabilities very naturally.

**props**
I used clusters and adjusted weight of points to give them different values to control them properly. I had to consider those functions when I needed to animate those props. Actually the hardest part was to animate the lines of the slingshot and neck-ring in my movie, but I could control those groups of points using the clusters. It gave me great advantage to control those strings properly.

• **Texturing and Lighting**

**texturing**
Since I made my all characters and backgrounds using subdivisions, texture mapping was one of the biggest challenges for me. I had to make color and bump map files for every character which contained a proper feeling for them. Then, using the projection tool of Maya, I had to match up those files to my characters. I tried to keep the same cartoon style for my all characters by simply using different colors, so I avoided using distinct and realistic bump map textures. I used a textured light to get a natural undersea effect. After placing a top spotlight, I put a water texture, and animated it until I got natural wave.

**lighting**
I used a directional light for the main sunlight and big spotlight on every side and the top and bottom to get proper brightness. Since my background is outdoors, I had to choose a directional light for the shadow, which lights from the same direct angle for all objects. I checked the shadow options of that directional light and increased the Dmap Resolution and Filer options as much as my computer allowed to get strong and smooth shadows.
• **Animation**

The main points of my animation are energetic motions and exaggerated expressions. Since my film is simple and funny cartoon style, I thought it should be showed by this style. I had my characters' face exaggerated to give them a funny cartoon style expression, and I broke tangent lines in the graph editor as often as I could to give my characters' energetic motions. Those are very effective ways to make my characters' movements alive. Another thing that I was very careful about was the detail of characters' actions such as the arm, finger, and neck movements. I make them move continuously through whole movie. At least, I made him scratch some part of his body. It's not an obvious part, but I believed this subtle thing could enhance my movie. To animate a tree, shower cloth, boat and pot which were moved by wind, I put some random key frames and repeated those keys through whole movie, and I used soft body function to get natural movement for the seaweed animation. After a lot of trial and error, I succeeded at getting natural movement. Finally, before rendering, I turned on motion blur option. It made my characters motion look smoother when my characters moved fast.

• **Final Editing and Sound**

I made a basic *quicktime* movie in *After Effects 5.0* to put in some effects and transitions, then imported those *quicktime* movie files to *Final Cut Pro 2.0*. It gave me the best quality pictures and a chance to edit in real time. To make sound effects, I downloaded wave files from the internet and school's sound effect CDs, and adjusted them in *Sound Forge* to synch them up with the action. Then, Neil G. Larson, a professional film music
composer, provided me with perfectly timed music so I could just add this sound track into my final mix.

5. Conclusion

Since I am a somewhat serious person as an animator, I wanted a challenge to present a funny cartoon style. I think mostly it has been realized as much as I want, but I know the quality of my work is not enough. However, during the making of my thesis movie, I could understand all the steps of movie making procedure, from getting ideas and storyboarding to final editing. Spending one year with one project presented me not only with a thesis movie but also with a great confidence. I am really satisfied with ‘food chain’ not because I presented my best work, but because of what I made and what I learned from this project.

I believe this special experience will make me a professional animator someday.
Appendix A :

Original Thesis Proposal and Revised Story
Proposal for an MFA Thesis Project

Men on the water!
By
Eun-Soo Kim

MFA Imaging Arts/Computer Animation
School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York
April, 2001

Howard Lester, Chair
Professor
School of Film and Animation

Skip Battaglia
Professor
School of Film and Animation

Duane Palyka
Associate Professor
School of Film and Animation
Treatment

Men on the water!

Premise: Greedy people never know their real problem!

There are several houses on the sea and a small island near the village. The sun is shining and small clouds are around the houses. It is very calm and nice day. Suddenly, a strange bird flies to the village. It is strange looking bird and makes a strange sound, too. Everyone who looks greedy is watching the bird and then closes the door. The bird sits down on one house which is the biggest in the village for a minute and then it flies away. Strangely, the house on which the bird sat is sinking slowly. Because of the scream of a man, everyone is looking outside again. They are surprised at first, but then trying to get some stuff that is floating around their houses.

The next day, the bird flies in the village again. Everyone is watching it, holding his breath. The bird is sitting on the next biggest house. As soon as the bird sits down, the house begins to sink. The bird says “oops” and flies away. Again, they are very surprised the house is sinking but still getting some floating stuff.

All houses are sinking in turn except one house. During that time, the last house has been swelled very much. A man who looks a little bit fat is sleeping inside of the house. The bird makes sounds outside. The man wakes up in a hurry, shaking his head. He runs to upstairs and goes out to the roof with a long stick. The bird is trying to sit down on the roof. As soon as finding the bird, he wields the stick to drive it away. But the bird keeps flying around the house. He takes out a slingshot and shoots at the bird several times, but he can’t make it. The bird easily avoids it and even starts mocking him by flying near the house. The man is getting upset. He is yelling to the bird but the bird is giggling. The bird sits down near cloud. He glares at the bird, but the bird ignores him, and begins whistling. The man moves here and there as if he shows off his martial arts. The bird is watching him and claps its hand. The man brings a chair and cushion and keeps watching the bird. Soon after, the bird flies away. The man looks so tired but draws a big breath and looks around his house. He frowns his face. There is no house except his house and an island near his house. Suddenly he smiles and goes back inside his house.

The man puts his household goods on his small boat and moves his stuff to the island. The man does this repeatedly. Now the island is full with his stuff. The man hears the bird sound again. The man hurries to load the last of his stuff and leaves for the island. This time the bird brings its friends. The man lands on the island and is watching what happens to his house. But the house is fine, even though the birds are sitting and playing on the roof. Instead of the house sinking, however, the island is sinking.
Revised treatment

Food chain

(There is a small island at the sea. A man and a bird are there. The man is taking a nap but he looks like fishing. A bird is floating.)

A couple of fishes are swimming under the sea. Suddenly a male fish is finding a female fish. A strange looking bird(named X) catches a female-looking fish with a smile. A male fish is surprised but tries to find another female fish. However, whenever he finds a female fish, the bird X is catching the female fish. The male fish is tries to catch the bird X but he fails. The bird X is floating and watching a man who is snoring at the chair. As soon as the bird X tries to swallow a fish, a bell sound is ringing in the air. The bird X gets flustered and scared. The bird X tries to swallow the fish but is dragged by a man(named Z). There is the bird X at end of the fishing rod. The man Z fastens the ring on its neck and torments the bird to get the fish and swallow that. The bird X is in pain but he smiles. The man Z kicks the bird X’s ass and sits on the easy chair. The man Z is watching the bird X which is painful on the sea. He throws a stone to make the bird X dive into the water to get another fish. The bird X tries to avoid that helplessly. The bird X doesn’t want to do again even the bird X looks starving. The bird X is finally crying with watching the heavy neck ring.

The bird X is looking at the sky. The bird X finds a flying bird(named Y) that looks very imposing and brave. The bird X is waving its wings to get some help. The imposing Y finds the waving and sees the man Z. The bird Y is thinking for a moment.

While the bird X is waving, the man Z watches what happens in front of him and he makes a strange smile and rushes to his house. He finds something to catch another bird in a hurry. Finally, he grabs a slingshot and a neck-ring for another bird. He aims to the bird Y. the bird Y frowns and is rushing to him very fast.

In that moment, the floating bird X is watching what happens now and praying.
Finally, the man Z releases the slingshot and the stone is flying to the bird Y with a slow motion.

...... The man Z is fall down to the ground and the bird Y is smashing ......

The man Z and the bird X are swimming together with a smile. They are finding a couple of fishes. The one is a new female fish and the other is the previous male fish. The couple fishes are trying to run away but the bird X gets the female fish easily. As soon as the bird X gets the female fish, the male fish is rushing to the bird X with a huge anger. The man Z catches the male fish with a big mouth and smiles. Of course, there is a bell sound, again. The bird Y bird takes off a sunglass and lick it’s lip.

The bird Y drags the string to open their mouth. The man Z opens his mouth with a pain. As soon as the man Z opened, the male fish is suddenly getting bigger and eats the bird Y very fast. The bird X and the man Z are frozen. The male fish swallows the bird Y and spites the bone to the bird X and the man Z. The male fish is taking the female from the bird X’s mouth and they are diving to the sea. They are watching each other and cheering. But the man Z is making strange smile and catching to the bird X.

The end.
# Budget

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# Marketing Plan

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*All of Deadlines and Festival dates are for 2001.*
Appendix B :
Original Storyboard and Revised Storyboard
Original Storyboard -Men on the water-
The End
Revised Storyboard -food chain-
Appendix C :

Color Stills