Judged

Lawrence Neuberger

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Judged
by
Lawrence Neuberger

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

MFA in Imaging Arts, School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute OF Technology
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
September, 1999

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Marla K. Schweppe
Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

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Adrianne Carageorge
Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

-------------------------------
Tom Dubois
Sr. Animator
Post Central
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Title, Judged

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Thesis Paper

"Judged"
Judged

Judged is a film about the subconscious battle between good and evil. The way I see it, every person has a good side and a bad side. No matter how good a person is, there is always an evil side lurking in the back of their mind. Not every person acts upon this evil side. For some people, this evil side just takes over. For some others it is brought out by some other act. In this instance, a normal man is recruited to go to war. A gun is put in his hands and he is forced to kill. Gradually his evil side overtakes his good side and soon his evil side causes him to find enjoyment in the deaths of others. When the army finds this out they realize there is something wrong and decide to send him home.

Character:

There is basically one character in this movie. However, he plays two very different roles. There is the character before the war, and the character after the war. Before the war he is just an ordinary guy who leads an ordinary life. Then, once he is drafted and put in the war his personality and mental state change. It's a sort of Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde persona.
The character's brain is molded into a fighting machine, actually too good of one. He does his job too well and is sent home because he is not mentally fit to be in the war. What we don't know is that he is not mentally fit to be in a civilized community either.

As the movie progresses, so does the character. The audience can see his change of heart as it gets closer to his death time. He starts off as a normal man, somewhat afraid of death, but by the end he doesn't care anymore and feels he would rather be dead than in a society that destroys what they create.

**The Story:**

Once he is home he finds it hard adjusting to "normal" life. On a normal day as a soldier, he wakes up, grabs his gun, and looks forward to a day of killing the so-called bad guys. Now he has to wake up and get a job and lead, what we consider, a "normal life". Unknowingly though, his evil side is still overpowering the good in him. He feels as if he is missing something in his life. The overpowering enjoyment he gets when the life of someone else is in his hands. This feeling eats away at him until he finally gives in to the temptations that lie within him. He decides to find the bad guys in the world and kill them, which in turn, makes him feel like a better person and makes society a better place. Unfortunately, society doesn't take kindly to a
person who takes the law into his own hands. For some reason, when he was given a gun and told to kill someone by his own country it was alright. But, when he decides to take matters into his own hands, and do society a favor, it is considered wrong. Whether a soldier, a cop, or just a guy with a gun. There really is no difference. Nobody else agrees with this little theory, so in turn, he is sentenced to die by the electric chair. Hence, the end of his life and the end of this story.

This story did not come easy. The original idea was to see inside of a man's brain a watch a mental battle between good and evil. It was supposed to be a semi-serious look at how a good person is brought about to do bad things. After many rewrite the story became what it is today. I chose to put him in a war because things like this really happen. It's amazing how a person can change once a gun is put in their hands. There seems to be this sense of power and disillusionment. I chose to jump back and forth between the war and the jail for various reasons. It makes the audience pay more attention to what is going on, and it makes the film more visually stimulating. For an extra added touch I had two stories happening at once. A visual one(the war) and a verbal one(life after the war). At first I though it might confuse the audience but instead it helped simplify the story and made it much more understandable.

Another reason I chose to jump between time frames is because I wanted to take a "Sunset Boulevard" approach to the
format of my film. It starts in the present time with the main character being escorted down the corridor to his execution. Then the film goes into the past, recounting his experiences at war. Simultaneously, while the war is being shown, narration takes us into the future, with the protagonist talking about how hard it was adjusting going home and leading a normal life without the war and without the killing. He tells the story of how he got in his present situation in life without killing. The audience never finds out exactly what crime it was that he committed that caused him to be sentenced to death, but they know that he did something wrong. The audience can basically make their own assumption as to what that was.

So at this point there are actually two stories taking place. One being a visual one (the war), and the other being a verbal one (his adjustment to life after war). Once his story has been told the audience is brought back to the present time. The main character is shown in the electric chair, dead, with smoke rising from his body. His subconscious thoughts end the story by saying, "so here I am ....... gone.... so who's the killer now?". It gives the audience something to think about. Society created this so-called killer, now they killed him. The point being, do two wrongs make a right? So in reality, aren't we all killers in a sense? Haven't we all done something or made some decision in our life that caused the death or wrong doing to someone or something? I'd have to say the answer is yes.
Now getting back to my reason for the "Sunset Boulevard" theme. I felt it made the film more visually interesting jumping back and forth between past and present times. It gives the viewer more interest in the film and causes them to pay more attention to detail and what is going on in the story.

So in a sense I wanted to cause a little bit of confusion with the audience to make them become part of the film and have a kind of interactiveness with it. From my point of view and some viewer feedback, this attempt was quite successful.

A lot of people asked me, "why did you do such a serious movie?." My response to that question is that everyone seems to be taking a comical approach these days with animation. I did two other previous films, both of which were funny, and this time I was at a lack of ideas for a funny film. I seemed to have a comical writers block. So I went with more of a serious concept. I felt I could create a more fully-rounded movie as far as story, mood, and atmosphere. By playing with the lights I could create a visually dramatic look to each scene and give the viewer a sense of compassion towards the character.

Cinematography:

In general, for most of the shots, I tried to maintain a strong contrast between scenes. To do this I separated the
foreground and the background by playing with lights, color, and most importantly, shadows.

For all of the jail shots I tried to use somber lights with a slight fog mapped on. This dulled out most of the brighter colors in the scene and gave it a very dull and depressing kind of look to it. I wanted the viewer to feel the uncomfortableness of a jail and how the character probably felt at that moment. However, by doing this, the characters were dulled out as well. So I solved this by linking several different lights to each character. Sometimes to individual body parts. I made these lights a bit brighter so the characters did not get lost in the backgrounds. I didn’t make a drastic change in the intensity, but just enough to separate the characters from the background. This also brings the viewers focal point firstly to the characters, then secondly to the backgrounds.

The war scenes were a bit tougher to light. I could not light the characters the same. The lighting would be too strong and therefore the scenes would be less believable. So to make the war scenes better, I had to do a lot of playing with the shadows. By doing this I could keep one side of the character bright, and the light would slowly fade to shadows as it went across his face. This would make the character more noticeable and at the same time, the shadows would blend him into the background a little better and make him more realistic.

Another part of my film that played a big part in making it
more life-like was the particle effects I used. Particles helped bring my film to life in many different aspects. My first use of particles was for the electric current traveling up the wires and the sparks that flew out of the electric chair when he was electrocuted. The electric current that travels up the wires when the guard pulls the switch shows the intense pain that the character is about to have unleashed on him. Now the sparks really help bring the electric chair scene to life. Without them the scene wouldn't be as believable. Granted, it is a bit over the top, but it does add a lot to the scene and makes the viewer feel his pain as the electricity pumps through his body. The particles in the war scenes really played a big factor. The only draw back to using all of these particles was the increase in my render time. It doubled the usual time for a frame and in some cases I would only get two to five frames rendered a night as compared to thirty or forty without particles. But all in all it was worth it because it made the final product all that much better.

The particles used for the explosions were quite simple. I tried to create my own explosions but the task was too great and I was short on time. so I found some explosions on a CD and tweaked them to get various effects. each explosion is different. the may look the same in the movie but each one moves differently. mainly because of a wind force linked to each one blowing in a different direction. Once this was complete I
added a separate particle emitter on top of it. This one was to produce rocks flying up from the ground. This was a hand made particle emitter which I added a gravity force to, which made the ground blow up as the rockets exploded. The particles on the rockets were a bit harder. To create these I had to use a default setting and tweak various functions and parameters to get the right effect. I also had to play with a particles parameter in the render globals to get the right feel for it. Before changing all of this, the rocket thrust had a very computer like feel to it. By playing with these components (mostly life span, generation, particles per second and translucence) I was able to give the rockets a more realistic look. This helped the scenes greatly. Not only did the smoke look real, but it gave the rockets a more believable look as well as the rest of the scene.

The biggest particle effect of the all was the grass. It started off as a motionless plane that had a very flat, two dimensional, unrealistic look to it. I then decided to do it with particles to make it look better. I used a hair particle emitter, changed the life span, generation, size, and elasticity. I also added a color map to it. Then, I linked two forces to it to give it a sway like a breeze was blowing on it throughout the war. This helped the war scenes tremendously. It brought a sense of life to the scenes that were not present before, especially when the rockets exploded. There was a faint highlight on the individual blades of grass when the rockets exploded. When this occurs

8.
the viewer can see all the details as far as shape and texture of the grass, and hopefully they can appreciate it more and see all the hard work that went into making the film. It was the little details like that which helped make the film a success.

**Sound:**

The final touch to make the film complete was the sound. I got an excellent soundtrack from a friend (Jason Donati) who scored it for each cut in the film. I was extremely pleased with the final product he presented to me. All the voices in the film were done by a house mate of mine (Dave Babson) and myself. I altered the voices a bit in Sound Edit16. The main characters voice was made to sound as if it were disguised. All of the other sounds were created from various recordings and altered to fit the individual scene. These sounds were tough. They were compressed so much that when I brought them into the Avid they nearly blew out my ear drums. I had to play with the volume and frequency controls with these a lot so not to cause any permanent hearing damage. Once the sound was down to a reasonable level, I had to go back into the Avid and get the timing right. There were some cases where the explosion sound effects happened before the actual explosion occurred. In order to fix this, as well as, other problems of that nature, I had to grab the sound effects and move them so they
were placed at the right place in time. This sounds really simple, but it is actually quite hard to place a sound effect, that is probably less than a fraction of a second long, in the right place in time.

**Conclusion:**

Finally the movie was done. At least I thought it was. After watching it at home, minutes after watching it on the Avid, I realized the sound was totally off. The war was still too loud, the voice over too low, and everything seemed to mumble together and you couldn’t understand anything. So I went back to the Avid the next day (one day before it closed for the quarter) prepared to bribe whoever was using it with twenty dollars for ten minutes worth of time on the machine. Luckily, a friend of mine (George Stankovich) was using the machine I needed and he gave it to me for the last hour of his time, free of charge.

So after lots of last second pressure and lots of corrupted disk problems, I finished. I am ninety nine percent happy with the finished product. I only wish a had maybe three more weeks to re-render two scenes (one of which I lost due to a corrupt disk and had to cut out) and fix some minor sound effects errors and timing problems. They may not be noticeable to the viewer, but I can see them and hear them, and it bugs me
enough to want to fix them. But all-in-all, I am very pleased with the final outcome of my film and even happier to be finished. One and a half years of working on the same film was a long time, and it got to me here and there. But I battled through those tough times, finished it, and very happy with the final results.
APPENDIX A

Thesis Proposal


**Judged**

**Treatment**

My thesis project will be a 3 - 4 minute computer animation.

**Synopsis**

Bill is sentenced to die by electric chair. He stares out of his cell waiting to be escorted to the chair. A guard slowly walks down the corridor and opens the cell door. He then takes him to the electric chair, sits him down and straps him into the chair. Bill sits with a blank look across his face. A red light flashes in the background and the switch is pulled. A voice (Bill's conscience) starts to tell a story about how he became a killer and we are put in the middle of a war. Missiles are launched, bombs explode and guns fire. Men are quickly running back and forth and die just as quick. One man, Bill, stands on top of a small hill rapidly firing a machine gun. Bodies are dropping to the ground everywhere. One is still alive. Bill slowly walks over and takes a glance into the dying man's eyes. He hesitates for a second and then an evil grin overcomes his face. He slowly pulls back on the trigger and he finishes the job. A bomb explodes nearby and with a quick flash of light, we see Bill in the electric chair, dead, and with smoke coming off his body. The voice proceeds to say how we, the society and the system, made him a killer. Now we must live with the fact that we killed him......So what does that make us?

**Method**

The film will be modeled and animated on the Silicon Graphics Machine using Alias/Wavefront. Rendered images and scenes will be recorded on an optical disk and then later edited onto an SVHS tape. I will also use Adobe Photoshop to create some backgrounds and textures and import them into Alias.

All music will be done by a student from the Eastman School of Music generated solely by computers..

All sound effects will be recorded from sound effect CD's or created by myself.
Shot List

1. man stares out of his cell waiting to die.
2. A guard slowly walks down the corridor and opens the cell.
3. Cut to man in the electric chair.
4. A hand slowly pulls the switch.
5. Man is electrocuted.
6. Cut to war. Rockets are launched from one side. Bombs explode in the background.
7. Rockets are launched from the opposing side. Bombs explode in the background.
8. Men run back and forth. Some drop to the ground. Bombs explode in the background.
9. Man stands on top of a hill rapidly firing his gun. Bombs explode in the background.
10. Bodies fall to the ground.
11. One man still alive gasping for air.
12. Man slowly walks over and looks down.
13. Close up of dying man.
15. A bomb explodes close by.
16. Man in the electric chair, dead, and his body is smoking.
17. Slowly fade to black. Role closing credits.
**Time Line**

All models will be built by the end of summer. Shaders will be applied to all models by the end of September 1997.

Starting at the beginning of September.

All characters modeled, shapeshift and attach skeletons

Starting October 1st.

week one.

Continue above

week two

Characters fully modelled, and shapeshifted.

week three

Start modeling jail.

week four

continue modelling jail.

November

week one

Do test renders of jail.
week two

Start modelling electric chair scene.

week three

Continue electric chair scene.

week four

Finish electric chair scene.
Do test renders.

December

week one

Start modelling war scene.

week two

Continue modelling war scene.

week three

Finish modelling war scene.

week four

Do test renders of war scene.
January

week one.

Continue tests of war scene.

week two.

Finish modelling electric chair scene.
Do test renders

week three

Animate shots 1-2

week four

Shots 3-4

February

week one

Shots 5-6

week two

Shots 7-8

week three

Shots 8-9
week four
Shots 9-10
March
week one
Shots 10-11
week two
Shots 12-13
week three
Shots 14-15
week four
Shots 16-17
April
week one-three

Edit all scenes from optical disk to SVHS tape.
record all music and sound effects to disk.
transfer to SVHS tape.
edit final piece.
# MFA Thesis Budget

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MFA THESIS MARKETING PLAN

In order to get my name known in the animation industry, I will enter my thesis in the following film festivals.

Asifa East Film Festival, New York, New York
Asifa North West Film Festival, Portland Oregon
Asiaf San Francisco Film Festival, San Francisco, California
An Arbor Film Festival, Ann Arbor Michigan
Animation Celebration, Los Angeles, California
Cascadia Film Festival, British Columbia, Canada
Chicago Film Festival, Chicago, Illinois
Los Angeles Film Festival, Los Angeles, California
Movies on a Shoestring, Rochester, New York
Siggraph, (location not yet known)
Seattle International Film Festival, Seattle, Washington.
APPENDIX B

Storyboard
APPENDIX C

Color Stills