Beetle Blasphemy

Ferris Webby
BEETLE BLASPHEMY
BY
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MFA Imaging Arts/ Computer Animation
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May, 2007

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When I began to develop *Beetle Blasphemy*, I wanted to accomplish a few goals which would not only support the film's story but also bring the film to a higher level of completeness. A thesis film, in my mind, is a project which must bring together all that you have learned and then proceed to allow for your own personality or fingerprint to be pressed into the mold. In my previous films, I worked to improve my skills in rendering, lighting, and visual and abstract storytelling. For *Beetle Blasphemy*, I wanted to try out a more narrative story, highlighting the aspects of dialog and character animation. This is not to say that I abandoned what I did in my first two films. I simply built upon this previous skill set with new challenges. Also, instead of making a wholly dramatic film, I wanted to dip into my comedic mind. Comedy is actually more of who I am personally. Since I was looking to fingerprint my thesis with a little of myself, a comedy was the perfect genre to delve into.

But, any project introducing new challenges will have its fair share of hurdles. With *Beetle Blasphemy*, I had to plan for a handful of new techniques and pipelines to master if the film had any hope of being successful. The film is quite conversational. Things needed to be done before any animation could be started. I definitely needed a full idea of what would happen in the film. To do this, a thorough storyboarding needed to be drawn which would have to be teamed with a detailed script. Storyboarding was something that I was familiar with but writing a full production script was something very new. I took a lot of time to refine my script and it required quite a few drafts to get it to a final version. The film was a comedy so things had to be funny. The film was also a short film so all the gags and jokes had to advance the plot as they played out. A succinct story had to be created so any unneeded gags that were brainstormed initially had to be dropped within the first few drafts of the script. Once a compact story was created, I had to refine the dialog so that the deliveries would be as natural as possible.
Voice actor selections were another concern of mine. I couldn't just get any group of people since I wanted my characters to have specific personality traits. Fortunately, I didn't have to look far for the perfect cast. I chose Adam Fisher for my main character, Bob. Bob is charismatically clueless and I believed Adam would be able to perform this part very well because of his optimistic sounding voice. The Sid character I created is entirely Bob's counterpart. He is a very pessimistic character filled with sarcasm. Karabo Legwaila was a perfect match here since he was naturally very sarcastic. Karabo was also a great actor in general and his line deliveries were always wonderfully hilarious. Arnie's character was the peacemaker of the group but also, at the same time, stirred things up. He kept Sid relatively calm but also encouraged Bob to continue with his shenanigans. His voice had to be passive and warm-hearted. Zachary Giles filled this role extremely well since he has a very laid back voice with a small southern twang. I really have to hand it to my voice actors. Without their talent, this film would have had little success.

I initiated the process of recording my dialog with an informal script reading. I brought all of my actors into a conference room and gave them each a print out of the current version of my script. From there we started to read through the dialog. I jotted down notes on how to deliver certain lines most effectively as well as any changes that had to be made to lines that weren't quite working at all. This first session was invaluable to the rest of the process since the actors got acquainted with the script all while I figured out how the chemistry was going to work. New ideas for lines and gags also cropped up from this reading, many of which made it to the final recorded script. When I was listening to the deliveries Adam, Karabo, and Zach were giving, I immediately knew that there was hope of my comedy being funny. After tweaking the script using the notes I made during the reading, we had our first of what ended up being three
recording sessions. I wanted the voice talents to play off each other so I could get more natural line deliveries which would enhance the comedy of the piece. Unfortunately, the school does not have a whisper room big enough to fit three people comfortably. My only option was to use a screening room that people told me was very quiet and had been used for recording in the past. I brought my actors to the room and we recorded a session directly into Pro Tools which was installed on the computer there. I was pumped to listen to the recording more closely later that night. To my dismay, after listening through the entire session, almost all the audio recorded was dirty. The voices sounded very echoed and hollow. I tried to fix this with filters but to no avail. I knew another session was needed. For the second recording, I needed to use the whisper room of the department so that I didn't risk a dirty soundscape. The problem was that the whisper room is a one-person facility; only one of my actors would be able to record at a time. Thus I couldn't have them play off each other's deliveries as in the first recording attempt. To solve this, I used my old recordings as a reference for my actors. This way I could retain the old deliveries but now with a clean soundscape. The second recording went as well as the first. My actors are a really talented group of people so I basically expected it to go that way. Even though the session went perfectly, the sound quality of the recorded audio was still not up to par. It was far better than the first recording, and could almost be fixed with filters, but it still sounded slightly hollow. I talked with a few people and we concluded that it was the microphone I was using. I recorded my actors with a shotgun microphone in the whisper room since the whisper room's microphone wasn't functional. The proper microphone for a whisper room would be more like a cardioid microphone. Even though I still had a dirty dialog track recorded, I needed to proceed with the production of my film and, at the time of my second recording, I was at the first pass animation stage. My plan was to schedule another recording time for my actors where
they will listen to the second recording's audio and try to exactly match the deliveries. This enabled me to proceed through the first pass of animation using the second recording as a reference for my characters' body motion. I was then free to schedule a good time for the third recording attempt without rushing my actors at all.

After I was almost completely done with the first pass of my animation, I held the third recording session. This time I used a cardioid microphone which was hooked up to a Marantz digital audio recorder. This audio recorder performed much better than the one I was using during my previous recording sessions since it recorded directly to digital files on a flash card. I didn't have to deal with capturing and splitting the audio from a DAT tape after the recording to get it into the computer. Each line delivery was saved to its own file on the flash card thus making the process of organizing my recordings much easier. I now had an organized collection of clean dialog that was ready to be a reference for lip sync animation.

While dealing with script and story, I also started to construct my character models. I knew what types of characters were needed for the specific personalities but I had to create a character design that accentuated these character traits. Once I knew exactly who I'd be getting as my voice actors, I immediately went to work on character design based on my actors' own physical traits. I didn't do an exact copy of these physical traits, but I added a touch of my voice actors' appearances so that their deliveries would mesh with the characters' basic physical appearances. The main character of my film, Bob, I had to make inviting. Adam has really friendly eyes so I went with that as a reference for Bob's eyes. Sid I made to be a pushy, aggressive, and slightly overweight character. Karabo is far from overweight but he has a weighty voice so I mostly used Karabo's face as a template for Sid's. Arnie's appearance is meant to hint that he's quite the fan of the ganja weed. Zach is definitely not a pothead but he
has a slender build with long, loose hair. This fit perfectly with the character of Arnie so I worked those traits into Arnie's design, giving him a long lanky look with antennae that hang in front of his face.

Even though I had a good idea of my characters' designs, I had to still had to have some sort of connecting attribute that would meld their looks into some sort of style. Each of their designs were so different, the only thing I could do was to use the same arm and leg designs and also give them all the same type of yellow eyes. Doing this gave the character designs a commonality that was very much needed to convey a cohesively styled world.

Another thing I wanted to focus on from the start of production is to create semi-asymmetric characters. Too often do you see in student films perfectly symmetrical character designs. I did not want to take that path. I also wanted to model both sides of my characters independently. Usually you'd model one side and then mirror the geometry for the other side. If you wanted asymmetry you'd then change the mirrored half slightly. I figured I could create more natural asymmetry if I just modeled both sides without any mirroring. Also, with this method I could organize the topography of my model much better. One of the most striking elements of asymmetry in my character designs was the difference in eye sizes from one side of the body to the other. Bob is especially asymmetrical in this way because I wanted him to have a clueless air about him. Bob's body is also structured with a small tilt which adds to this air. The other major character's also have asymmetry but to a much lesser degree. It was important that Bob's asymmetry stand out a bit more than the other characters so I restrained myself when modeling Sid and Arnie.

I decided to use a new pipeline when it came time to UV map my character models. Instead of using Maya's built-in UV mapping functionality, I imported the models into a program
called Modo which has a more robust collection of UV mapping tools. This program enabled me
to flatten my UV maps much better than if I just used Maya. After I finished flattening the UVs
within Modo, I simply imported the new meshes back into Maya for texturing.

When thinking about how I wanted my characters to look with respects to surface texture
and shading, I needed to create something that diverted from an already established aesthetic
such as a look similar in style to Pixar's "A Bug's Life" or Dreamworks' "Antz". I did not want
to deal with having a film that copied a well-known style. I decided to try and utilize iridescence
in my characters' specularity. The majority of beetle species have some form of iridescence as a
textural trait. The question then was how I'd accomplish this style. After researching this for
some time, I came across multiple techniques in creating iridescence on an object's material. All
of these techniques seemed way too involved for my liking. I wanted a simpler process. So I
started playing with Maya's many nodes to see if I could create my own shader network. I ended
up figuring out that if I connected a ramp surface shader that was based on light direction to the
specularity of the character's material, the result was very much what I envisioned. I chose the
ramp colors by looking at some reference pictures of bug iridescence and finding that usually a
blue to orange ramp is what existed in the natural world. Each of the characters had a slightly
different combination of colors, but on a base level, they had this blue to orange schema.

The basic colors for my beetles were also something I had to work out. Bob's color
changed from a very dark gray color to a deep purple since I found he needed to pop out from his
surroundings and a dark gray just made him a black hole. Sid actually started as a purple color,
but when Bob's color changed to purple I had to change it to more green. I really liked a picture
I saw of metallic green beetles (something similar to Japanese beetles) and I wanted to try and
use that color scheme for Sid. Arnie's color scheme was pretty different. There was a touch of
iridescence in his material but for him I wanted to focus on a colorful palette. Hearkening to Arnie's stoner tendencies, I wanted to give him a painted look that hinted at his hippie persona. Also the bright colors on his shell were balanced by the rather earthy colors of his body which again tied him to the appearance of a hippie.

I tried something totally new with the minor character of the blind termite. Since termites are basically translucent, I wanted to try and emulate that with a shading technique known as subsurface scattering. What this does is add a feel of light absorbency in your material. You can set the depth and spread of the light absorbency and at what magnitude that material will absorb the light. It will basically create the effect made when you hold you fingers in front of a flashlight. Some of the light from the flashlight will soak through your fingers. This will also happen with your ear, your nose, or any soft tissue on your body. It took a good amount of tweaking to get the termite's material to how I wanted it since the shading network in Maya for subsurface scattering is a little more complex than your regular shaders. The biggest attribute that effected the look of my subsurface scattering had to be the Scale Conversion attribute which acted as a global scale to the scatter amount. Once I brought that up from 1 to 10, the tweaking got a lot easier. I also used this shading technique for the aphids that can be seen in Bob's congregation near the middle of the film.

It's pretty obvious that the world of Beetle Blasphemy had to gel with the look of the characters in the film. Since I introduced into the character materials some realistic phenomena, I had to also make the world semi-realistic in design. This meant that I had to worry about a few obstacles. The first problem I tackled was the creation of the grass. I had to find a way to mass produce grass that was textured with a sense of realism in mind. I figured grass is basically the same shape when it is not bent. The bending of the grass blade is what gives it it's individuality.
I took this realization and modelled one grass blade. I added to this model a basic skeleton with which I could pose the grass blade. I bent the grass blade into various shapes and then duplicated it so that with each bent shape I created a brand new type of grass blade. I did this about nine times in all and grouped them into three tufts of three blades with various rotations and scales. Then I duplicated the tufts, again with various rotations and scales, and I started to form areas of grass. Finally I took the areas and duplicated those with various rotations and scales to make the film's grassy backdrop. I created three sets of textures for the grass, each having a different color, bump, and specular map. I only had to create three sets since the varieties of grass shapes created from all the duplication did most of the job with regards to a look of uniqueness among the blades.

The look of the wine bottle was also important when modeling and texturing the set. I figured the bottle had been sitting in the dirt for a bit. Because of this it probably should be scuffed and worn. On the other hand, Bob needs to see this bottle as a sign of his great purpose, so in some respects I needed it to be eye appealing. I solved this quandry by having the bottle pretty worn down but still having a slightly shiny finish. Also, I added gold foil lettering to the label of the bottle to further instill a sense of spirituality. I based the colors of the bottle in a red to deep maroon. This color combination is used as a symbol in many belief systems around the world and I wanted to display it here on what is basically the chapel of Bob's new order. The maroon also went with the red wine that was once contained in the bottle and offset the green and yellow canvas of the surrounding elements. In the film I wanted two worlds to be displayed. The wondrously mysterious world that was stained in red and the realistic and natural world garnished in greens and yellows. This scheme even crosses over to the characters. Bob is a clad in purple while Sid is mostly green and yellow. Arnie is also textured with greens and yellows
on his shell but blotch of red can be found near the top as well signifying that he is open to both worlds of thought.

With the selected story, characters, and visual aesthetic of *Beetle Blasphemy*, I knew from the beginning that 3D animation was the best forum to utilize to bring this film to life. It also didn't hurt that my expertise was in the 3D animation realm. A story that would gel with the aspects of 3D animation was purposely selected so I could utilize the abilities I have acquired as a student at RIT. An isolated and relatively constant setting was needed for the story such that the effort in creating the environment fit within the time constraints of the thesis. A dirt patch surrounded by grass matched these parameters pristinely. It had a complexity such that the viewer would be interested in the characters' surroundings but still encapsulated the area of interest into something manageable. The grass blades created a natural border to my set while the dirt patch enabled the characters to walk around freely with no major obstacles. One of the challenges I wanted to face was character animation and the interaction of characters within a scene. This of course required multiple characters. 3D animation excels at maintaining and efficiently utilizing multiple characters within an animation. The advantages of 3D animation in this arena out shined any of those in other forms of animation and was just another reason to use 3D animation to create the film. The narrative in *Beetle Blasphemy* required various effects such as those in lighting, fluids, and general dynamics. The use of 3D animation was again perfect to accomplish these tasks since other media would not come close to the ease and efficiency of successfully visualizing these effects. I wanted my Bob and Arnie characters to have very dynamic antennae to fit with their personalities. Animating these antennae manually in 2D or even in stop motion would be near impossible given my production team was composed of one person: me. 3D animation, however, has the ability of automating dynamic simulations to a
degree. Thus the animation of the antennae would be a matter of setting up a few attribute values and the computer did the rest.

In the end, a media such as 2D animation could not bring the depth and realism of the set and the dynamic motion which the computer could provide me in 3D. Stop motion animation would bring the correct set depth and realism but the animation would take longer than my time allowed. If a mistake is made in a stop motion shot, the shot usually has to be totally redone. This could expand the production time quite a bit considering my film ended up running 12 minutes. In addition, the animation in my film would most likely not be as smooth as with computer interpolated animation. It's very difficult to get your viewer focused off the jittery stop motion look of a film and on the story itself. 3D animation more easily acts as an open door to the storyline. The viewer can more easily enter the world of Beetle Blasphemy without feeling as much like an outside entity. I had to think hard about all of these pros and cons to finally decide that the story of Beetle Blasphemy would work as my final film at RIT.

Much of my research and development involved finding the best ways to accomplish the special effects and dynamic simulations in the film. For the dynamics of the characters' antennae, I discovered a secondary animation utility contained in Maya's Bonus Tools. The utility uses a setup composed of a spline IK which it makes dynamic by adding physics to the IK's base curve. The end result is automatic motion you would naturally expect with limp antennae. The initial creation of these spline IKs made my characters' antennae way too floppy. After experimenting with the attribute values though, I found that I needed to adjust the influence graph for the physics. Once this was scaled back, the motion became quite acceptable and took the weight of having to animate all the motion manually. After animating a character in a shot, I simply ran the dynamic simulation which calculated and cached the antennae animation.
The use of this utility enabled me to focus on what was much more important: the character animation of the film.

The wine that appeared throughout the film was done with Maya's own fluid dynamics. A plane with Maya's Ocean Shader was created and a fluid container was positioned around it. The ocean shader was responsible for the normal tide of the wine and its refraction and reflection of light. The wakes created from the characters' footsteps, however, was the responsibility of the fluid container which used wake deformers that were located on the characters' feet to calculate the generated ripples. The caching of these ripples was very similar to the process of caching the dynamic antennae.

The animation process of *Beetle Blasphemy* was composed of various stages or passes each of which refined the actions of the characters by another level. Before the main set of the film was fully constructed, a quick low resolution mockup was created. This set reference was then used to map out the positions and movements of the characters in each shot. Since I wanted to do different tasks of production in parallel, I needed a way to begin animation while I was still constructing the characters. To do this, animation rigs were developed around low resolution versions of the characters' geometry. I used this low resolution rig to start the animation while I continued to develop the finalized high resolution meshes of the characters. My first pass of animation consisted of animating all of the film's shots with my low resolution rigs. In this pass, just the basic motion of the characters was animated including body language for the characters' dialogue. My initial voice recordings were used as a timing reference for all of the film's actions and in doing this I discovered that animating to a voice recording makes the final product so much easier to obtain in a timely manner. Believable motion and expression can be obtained quickly by focusing on keying on words of emphasis. The waveform of the recordings depict
these emphasis points very clearly since they usually show as amplitude spikes. This discovery came as a relief, being that I never animated anything to dialog previously.

After completing blendshapes for all of my characters and my final voice recordings were created, the second pass of animation began. In this pass, lip sync and facial expressions were added to all of the characters' actions. I found that over-enunciating the dialog made the lip sync look very odd so at times I had to strip down my lip sync keys so that a more natural lip motion was created. Again the waveforms of my audio recordings aided the process greatly since vowels of emphasis were easily noticeable and they created a base of keys for syncing the characters' dialog.

The final pass of animation was nothing more than a finesse pass where I adjusted any problem areas of animation. Secondary animation and overlapped keys also were added to create a natural flow to character actions. Although it doesn't sound like this pass was very difficult, it actually took some time to complete. Refining motion is an arduous and time consuming task.

*Beetle Blasphemy* could not have been completed in the time allotted without the great help of the new renderfarm at RIT. Though it was still being beta tested, the farm was a tremendous aide in rapidly rendering shots, allowing more time for rerenders and multi-pass renders. For a few shots, I was able to include an ambient occlusion pass. Without a the renderfarm this probably wouldn't have been possible. In addition to the renderfarm, I discovered that I didn't have to travel to the school and back to set up and submit my renders. I configured my computer to connect to the school's Virtual Private Network. Once connected I used the renderfarm's web front end to submit and manage my renders. Wasted travel time was completely eliminated by using this remote login procedure.

The screening of *Beetle Blasphemy* went very well considering it was shown at the end of
the program. I didn't get too many comments from the crowd since most of the talkative members were either really tired or had left early. The comments I did receive were all very positive. Charles Bandla stated that I achieved a rarity in thesis films. My vision stayed relatively consistent from the film's beginnings to the final screening and that is apparently very uncommon. Thesis films usually end very different in concept from where they first started in production. Charles Bandla's comment made me feel really good about my film's scope management. My last film suffered from a bloated scope and the story had to be chiseled down to a very bare form because of it. I didn't want to make that mistake again and I'm glad that I succeeded in this aspect of production.

At the end of it all, I come out very much pleased with my efforts. I accomplished all of which I wanted including character animation, lip syncing, and dynamics. The most important success of the whole production though was creating an entertaining comedy. I have found comedy to be no small feat to write and I'm very pleased the story was so well received at the screenings. I have now started the festival phase of Beetle Blasphemy's life cycle in hopes that more people will be able to view the film. I recently also submitted to the Student Academy Awards and am hoping to a least make it into the Regional competition. The film will most likely stay in the festival circuit for about a year but if it obtains a good amount of success I'll leave it in for an additional year.

*Beetle Blasphemy,* at its core is about the consequences of the passivity of blind faith. You need to stay active in your ideas and beliefs, constantly refining your thoughts and knowledge based on new information. I can apply this concept to the future of my filmmaking career. The worst thing I can do is to keep with the knowledge I have and never really actively refine or enhance it in any way. I plan to consistently dabble with new concepts, trying out new
applications in both the computer and my story structures. Laziness is easy to fall prey to but in this particular field, with new ideas and philosophies being created daily, you'll never survive as a passive and content member. You need to expand to survive in the world of filmmaking. Otherwise people will start to call you a hack and that's way worse than being simply called a bad filmmaker.
Appendix A
Original Proposal
"BEETLE BLASPHEMY"
BY
Ferris Webby

MFA Imaging Arts / Computer Animation
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APRIL, 2005

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Approved For Submission:
Title: Beetle Blasphemy
Start Date: 6/2005
End Date: 5/2006
Budget: $1,023.00 (see attachment)
Running Time: 5 minutes
Release Format: DV, VHS, DVD

Story: A beetle falsely starts to believe that he is the Messiah and now his buddies need to intervene before their friend’s belief gets out of hand.

Synopsis: We see a row of grass blades, looking bigger than life, as if the camera is very small. Behind this grass hedge we hear the sounds of running feet and we see the back grass moving slightly. Suddenly we hear a stumble and see Bob the Beetle tumbling out of the grass and onto the dirt ground. He slowly gets up and dusts himself off as something catches his eye. Bob looks up and his mouth drops open in an expression of awe. We see from bottom to top what we know as a shard of a glass bottle sticking up out of the dirt. It glistens in the daylight, as Bob stands in front of it silent and wide-eyed. Bob starts to move forward but, just as he does, the sun hits the bottle shard so that a beam of light shines down on Bob. He stops his motion forward and basks in the heavenly light. Angelic music can be heard. Bob closes his eyes and a smile spreads from ear to ear as if in a trance. The light fades but Bob remains in his trance. Two sets of footsteps are heard in the grass behind Bob and a call for him echoes through the air. Two beetles, Arty and Sid, walk out of the grass. Sid spots Bob, who is still motionless in front of the bottle shard. He gets Arty’s attention and points toward Bob. “There he is,” he says. They both call over to Bob asking him what he’s doing. Bob doesn’t
answer at first but, as they get closer, he snaps out of his trance and acknowledges them with an enthusiasm about what had just happened. He tells them all about the light, a sign from the heavens. He suddenly comes to the conclusion that he must be the Messiah. Sid and Arty don’t pay much attention to this and tell him it’s time to leave. Bob refuses and drops down to the ground in protest and says he must not leave his holy grounds. He says that there must be a purpose for the Messiah and thus he will begin the healings tomorrow morning. Arty flings his hands up in the air in disgust and tells Sid to just let him go and that he’ll eventually find his way back home. They leave and we see Bob still sitting in protest as the hours pass by into night.

The next morning Arty and Sid are traveling through the grass again when suddenly they see Bob still in the same place they left him, but now he is surrounded by a handful of people listening to what only can be described as a televangelist rant. Arty starts to look very annoyed. They watch on as Bob is seen preaching to his congregation. A small bug walks up to Bob and tells him that he has been blind since birth, but he has the Faith and believes Bob can cure him. A sparse crowd surrounds them as Bob goes into a dramatic schpeel as you would see at any televangelist event. Bob gets the crowd into the act by having them chant for the will of the Almighty to be done. Bob grasps the young bug’s forehead, chants in tongue something unrecognizable, and releases with such a force, it knocks the young bug to the ground. A sound of awe is heard from the crowd as the little bug composes himself from the fall. Slowly, the bug opens his eyes and a big smile appears on his face. He announces to the crowd that he can see. The bug gets up and starts to walk away normally. Bob falls to a meditative position and tells the crowd that they must disperse, for the Messiah needs his rest. Sid
looks at Arty and tells him that he’s had enough and they must intervene. Arty agrees and they walk over to Bob, who’s still meditating on the ground. Sid calls to Bob to get his attention. Bob responds by saying, “If it isn’t my loyal apostles, Sidaeus and Art-thalamu.” Sid, trying to restrain his anger, tells Bob that their names are Sid and Arty and they are not his apostles, they are his friends. Arty interrupts Sid saying that like any friend, they’re here to help. Sid comes back at Bob by asking him what he just did. Bob answers with, “Oh that. That, my good disciple, is called a miracle. I will do many more before my time here ends.” This makes Sid lose all his restraint and he exclaims at Bob saying that he just made a kid think he can see. Bob explains that he did restore that child’s sight and the young will be forever free of any barriers he might encounter. Just then, the young bug that was cured knocks into a blade of grass and falls to the ground. He then gets up and stumbles off screen. Bob tells Sid that he is no longer known as Bob, but now is called Allah-wiscious. The name Bob is too earthly for his liking. Sid then yells at Bob saying that he’s crazy and that a beetle cannot be a Messiah. Bob finally gets that his friends don’t think he’s the Messiah and offers to prove to them that he is. He walks over to a bubble of water, pauses for a moment as if gaining strength, and proceeds to walk to the water bubble’s center. Bob, looking happy with himself, tells his friends that if they don’t think he’s the Messiah then explain how he just walked on water. Both Arty and Sid put their head in their hands. Bob, looking annoyed that they weren’t overcome with awe, forcefully points at his feet and starts jumping up and down while explaining to them that he has just walked on water and now he’s in fact jumping on it. A voice is heard to the Bob’s left. Another beetle walks past Bob on the bubble greeting him and congratulating him on being the Messiah. Bob’s jumping up and down
slows to a stop. He thinks for a second and then states that he can summon the Lord at will. He walks over to his friends and stands for a second in silence.

After a few seconds of Bob’s friends looking back and forth from each other to him, Bob starts a chant by raising his arms to the sky and pleading for the Lord to send him a sign. He calls to God to show his friends proof that he is the Messiah. Suddenly a beam of light shines down from the sky. Arty and Sid appear terrified and run off. Bob sees this and shows a smirk. The beam of light continues to shine on him as we hear angelic music. Suddenly we see the beam of light shrinking and expanding. Bob looks a little confused. We can see a faint outline of what we know as a magnifying glass within the very bright source of light in the sky. The beam then shrinks to a tiny spot and at the same time moves up to Bob’s forehead. Bob, looking cross-eyed at the spot of light, mentions that it’s getting mighty hot out. A thin stream of smoke rises from Bob’s forehead and he sniffs twice. We then cut to credits with the sound of sizzling still audible.

“Beetle Blasphemy” will be a 3D animated short. It will incorporate semi-realistic texturing and will focus on good character animation. The design of the set and characters will be somewhat of a stylized hybrid of both realistic and cartoony aesthetic. The film will be approximately 5 minutes in running length. I will use a musician for the music in my film and will use the Eastman School of Music to advertise for the position. I plan to complete “Beetle Blasphemy” by the end of the 2005-2006 Spring semester.
Thesis Timeline Breakdown

Week 1: Finalize Script, Storyboards, Rough voice recording

Week 2: Storyboards, Rough voice recording

Week 3: Animatic, Design Theme

Week 4: Animatic, Set Design

Week 5: Voice recording, Set Design

Week 6: Voice recording, Set Design, Set Blocking

Week 7: Character Design, Set Modeling

Week 8: Character Design, Set Modeling, Set Texturing

Week 9: Character Design, Set Modeling, Set Texturing

Week 10: Prop Design, Set Modeling, Set Texturing

Week 11: R&D, Prop Modeling, Set Texturing

Week 12: R&D, Prop Modeling & Rigging, Set Texturing

Week 13: Character Modeling, Prop Texturing, Posters For Musician

Week 14: Character Modeling, Prop Texturing

Week 15: Character Modeling, Character Texturing

Week 16: Character Modeling, Character Texturing

Week 17: Character Rigging, Character Texturing

Week 18: Character Rigging, Character Texturing

Week 19: Character Rigging, Character Texturing

Week 20: Blendshapes, Skinning, Refine Textures

Week 21: Blendshapes, Skinning, Refine Textures, Camera blocking

Week 22: Blendshapes, Skinning, Refine Textures, Camera blocking
Week 23: Animation – 1st Pass, Decide on Musician (send animatic and designs)

Week 24: Animation – 1st Pass

Week 25: Animation – 1st Pass, Recording Pickups

Week 26: Animation – 2nd Pass, Touch Base With Musician

Week 27: Animation – 2nd Pass

Week 28: Animation – 2nd Pass

Week 29: Animation – 2nd Pass

Week 30: Animation – Final Pass, Lighting Design, Touch Base With Musician

Week 31: Animation – Final Pass, Set Lighting

Week 32: Animation – Final Pass, Character Lighting, Rendering

Week 33: Animation – Final Pass, Scene Specific Lighting, Rendering

Week 34: Scene Specific Lighting, Rendering, Sound Design

Week 35: Scene Specific Lighting, Rendering, Sound Collection (Foley, etc.)

Week 36: Scene Specific Lighting, Rendering, Rough Edit to Musician

Week 37: Rendering, Sound Effects

Week 38: Rendering, Sound Effects, Post/Compositing

Week 39: Sound Effects, Post/Compositing

Week 40: Sound Effects, Post/Compositing, Edit in Music

Week 41: Final Mix, Post/Compositing, Credits

Week 42: Post/Compositing, Print to tape

Week 43: Screenings
Appendix B
Original Script
Beetle Blasphemy Script

Character Key:
S -- Sid
A -- Arnie
T -- Termite
C -- Crowd
W -- Water Beetle

A

1: S: Come on Bob, get back here. Once we get through the grass you can gallivant all you want. Where'd he go now? Bob?

2: A: He's just a little curious Sid. No foul there. Hey little man. Where'd you go?

3: B: I'm over here.

4: S: Over where? Would you stand still for a sec so we can find you?

5: B: Don't worry I know the way. Just follow my .....ug...er....ah...gah..... lead.

B

6: A: Hoho dude. I heard that tumble from here. You alright?

7: S: You better be ok. I'll leave you for a mantis before I have to carry your carcASS back to the mound.

C

8: B: Hmmm. Eh. Pewttttt. (spits out dirt)
Wooooow (Sees wine bottle)

(Light sequence....Bob ends up on his knees in prayer.)

D

9: A: There's the little guy.

E


11: A: Why is he on his knees?

12: S: I have no clue. I swear his mother was an ant. I'm gonna smack him.
A: Dude..chill. You know you left that gig. The days of Sid the Aggressor are over. Remember Sid the Sensible, Sid the Kind, Sid the Big, Fuzzy, Cuddly Teddy Bea----

S: OK! Fine. I won't touch the little twit.

F

S: Bob, what are you doing. Bob. Bob? (Whack) Geez I knew it. I just knew I was gonna end up hitting him Why is my system not working Arnie.

A: You were on Step 7 – Haven’t hurt a fly in 2 weeks. Well there was that one fly.

G

B: (rubbing head) Did you see it?

S: See what?

B: The light

S: The what now?

B: The light....it talked to me. It came down from over there and it did this crazy music thing and then it surrounded me like like all over me.

A: Dude that’s awesome! I’ve consumed quite a few forms of foliage that did the same thing. Good for you man.

B: It said I had a purpose. I am to be the Chosen Healer. The One for our time. I shall heal the sick and give legs to the legless.

(Sid looks back and forth from the wine bottle to Bob as Arnie give a big thumbs up behind him. Bob has a humorously anxious face on.)

H

S: Did anyone ever tell you that you're an idiot?

B: No.
26: S: Good then I'll be the first one. Bob you're an idiot. Arnie, let's go.

I

27: B: Wh... Where are you going? This is the new holy land.

28: A: Come on Bob. If I know anything about talking celestial lights, it's that, afterwards, you get a mad case of the munchies. Let's go get some grubs.

29: B: No, no I can't leave this place. I will stay and wait for my flock.

30: S: Suit yourself. He'll get scared and come home in a bit. In any case, If we stay, I punch.

31: A: I hope you're right man.

32: B: The healings will begin tomorrow.

33: A: I really hope you're right. Man, I'm itching for those grubs.

(We see Sid and Arnie leave and Bob eventually falls to a meditative sitting position as time lapses from day to night)

J

34: S: So I was wrong. I'm sorry. Let's just focus on finding him.

35: A: I hope the little dude's ok. He could be squashed in a ditch as far as we know.

36: S: Let's please not think of such beautiful things Arnie. I'm sure he's fine. I think the clearing was right through... here.

(Sid moves the blade of grass that was in the way of the camera until now.)

K

37: S: Oh man. Looks like he found his flock.

L

38: B: Take that into your minds. Take that into your hearts. Take it and share it with others. Let them all know the light is here now to save us all.

39: B: Now who is in need of the Light. Come forward and I shall heal.
40: S: Come on Arnie, I think we need to intervene.

41: A: Whoa whoa whoa. Sid, calm down and let him do his thing. Look at the man go. He's friggin magical. Bob the Beetle...Superstar, you know. Sans song of course. Let's see what the little messiah can do.

42: B: Come now. Anyone. You're all as important as anyone else. Please. Come forward.

43: K: I..I have an illness sir.

44: B: Yes good good. Come here son. What can the great Light do for you?

45: K: Sir...Well I have been blind since birth sir. And I'd like it greatly if I could see.

46: B: A termite who wants the gift of sight eh. Hmm.... Have you seen the light child?

47: K: Well I can't see much at all really sir. That's really the prob...

48: B: I said HAVE YOU SEEN THE LIGHT CHILD!?

49: K: Yes...yes sir. I have seen it. I have seen the Light.

50: B: OK then. You shall then be healed.

(Bob snaps his fingers and a cute little aphid hops into frame holding on his head a piece of leaf filled with wine.

51: B: Drink this divine water child as we cure you of your ails. Now don't be timid. Drink up. Here let me help you. (stuff leaf into termite's face so he has to chug the wine. Good that's it.

52: B: Chant with me now to save this child from the evils of darkness. Help me
bring him back to the Light where he belongs. Malaka Sephooa. Malaka Sephooa. Malaka Sephooa.

53: C: Malaka Sephooa. Malaka Sephooa. (termite continues to drink getting tipsier and tipsier.)

S

54: B: Hmmmdiittyditty humm ditty humm ditty. Child I give you SIGHT!! (Bob pushes termite to the ground with a force. The termite bounces his head off the ground.)

55: C: (awe sound)

T

56: K: (seeing stars intermingled with pink elephants) I...I...I THINK I CAN SEE!! Oh the colors. So beautiful.

57: B: The Light has made this happen child. Now go and spread the word. All of you now, go tell others of what you have seen here. I must rest, for channelling the Light tires my soul. (Termite gets up and aimlessly walks off.)

U

58: S: Ok now we intervene.

59: A: Whatever, but you're really beating down on his party.

60: S: I'll be beating down on something. That's a definite.

(Aphid hops in front of Arnie and Sid on the way over to Bob.)

V

61: Aph: You boys better turn right around lest you want a face full of fist.

62: A: Chill out. We're here to see the Superstar known as Bob.

63: S: Get out of my way.

64: Aph: I'm warning you chumps. You don't want this.

(Bob sees who it is.)

W
B: It's ok Brutis. They can come forward.

Aph: (apprehensively) I'll be watching you. (Smacks fist in hand and points to Sid. He then hops off cutely.)

S: What do you think you're doing.

B: Ah, if it isn't my very loyal disciples.

S: Discip?...we're your friends Bob and you need help. We saw that last stunt you pulled.

B: Stunt? That is no stunt. That my good disciple is called... a miracle. I will do many more before my time here ends.

S: You tricked that kid into believing he could see!

B: No no no. I have given that child new eyes and now he will be forever free of all barriers.

K: BAMM!! (Kid termite smacks into a blade of grass in the background)

B: Oh and I am no longer known as Bob. Bob is too earthly a name for the Messenger. I am now known as.....Ringo.

S: OK Ringo. That's it! You're not the great Messenger. You don't have any crazy healing powers and personally I'm about two seconds away from kicking your butt back to larval.

(Arnie holds Sid back as Bob pauses.)

O: But you are wrong. (Arnie and Sid turn around to see an old grasshopper who was in the crowd.) The time of the Light has finally come. The flood is here and if you do not kneel to it, you will be set adrift and lost forever. (Pause as Arnie and Sid look at Ole Hoppy and pause for a bit.) (Ole Hoppy does a slow shrug of lonely defeat.) I'll go now.

(Arnie resumes holding Sid back)
B: Hmmm I sense nonbelief. Well then I guess I’ll have to show you.

S: Show us what. Bob. (pause) Where are you going?

B: You want a miracle. A true miracle. I'll give you one. Let's see you explain this.

(Bob does a slow majestic walk across a small pool of spilled wine.)

B: See this. Huh? Are you seeing it? I just walked and am now currently standing on divine water.

B: This is what you wanted to see is it not. Are you not impressed?

B: Why are you not impressed. I'M WALKING ON THIS HERE D-I-V-I-N-E W-A-T-E-R. LOOK, NOW I'M JUMPING ON IT.

Bug 1: (walking past Bob on the spilled wine) YYYYYYYo.

(Bob walks down from the spilled wine.)

B: Alright I admit that was not the best portrayal of a miracle. (To himself: I'll get my monks on making that a little more divine). But I can do better.

B: Yeah, I can do much better. I will call on the Light directly.

S: Now Bob, we can just go home and we can throw down a couple drops of dung juice, find some nice lady bugs,.....

B: NO! You must see the Light.

S: Ok fine Bob show us the light but if this doesn't work, we're going home!

B: Great. Now be silent for I must channel my thoughts.

(Bob does crazy meditative stuff. After which, a rumble is felt and heard and then a light appears down upon the three bugs.)
GG

90:   A: Duuuude that's tight. (Sid wears a confused grimace)

        (The light gets more intense.)

HH

91:   B: Ahhhhhh the liight... So beautiful. Are you convinced now Si...

        (Bob turns around to see his friends running for dear life into the grass blades
go ing out of sight with one final comedic leap.)

        (Bob looks up and sees something glimmering in the sky where the light is
coming from and makes out a peculiar shape. He looks down to see the beam of
light focus in an out and then way in. They bright pinhole of light rides his body
up to his forhead.)

II

92:   B: um hm.... hehe...getting mighty hot out....hehe...(sniff, sniff)....

        (Smoke starts eminating from his forhead. We cut to black and the credits with
the sound of a burning sizzle.)

JJ

93:   B: eek
Appendix C
Original Storyboards
Appendix D
Film Stills