11-2005

Buddy's Alphabet Adventure

Jeremy Andrew Galante

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Buddy's Alphabet Adventure
By
Jeremy Andrew Galante

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
November 2005

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Permission Granted

Title of Thesis: "Buddy's Alphabet Adventure"

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Jeremy A. Galante
Signature

11/11/05
Date
Introduction

“Buddy’s Alphabet Adventure” was a benchmark piece towards the development of my skill with Macromedia Flash. By focusing on efficiency of design and movement, the essential nature of Flash, I created a film of broadcast quality on a computer in three quarters that would have otherwise taken much longer on paper. It re-inspired me to pursue a career in filmmaking and stimulated a dream of launching a business in the future. It is my intention to fuel this career by the solid cast of characters that had been carefully tweaked for this film as well as utilize the library of cycles that were created through extensive combinations of Flash “tweening” and frame-by-frame animation.

Concept

The entire concept for my film was a collaborative idea between my brother, Lewis, and I. I had just come home after screening my two-quarter film, “To Beat the Band”, and was anxious to show it to everyone I knew. The film had been my first full project with Macromedia Flash and my growing confidence in and grasp of the interface was overwhelming me with ideas of where to potentially take a thesis. Since “To Beat the Band” focused around the use of the Wacom tablet and gestural character animation, I was thrilled to continue to see of what the program was capable.
After we had finished watching my film, we were discussing the potential of the software. He took out my DVD and put back in a “Baby Einstein” video that his one-year-old son had been watching previously.

After thinking for a moment, he said, “See, this is the kind of stuff you ought to do.” Whether joking at first or not, we began to elaborate on the concept. We discussed how teachers are always in need of fresh methods and resources to use as educational aids. It is an industry that will always be in demand, is quite successful, and has an ever-evolving and endless world of topics to be covered.

Most importantly, though, is the connection our family has to education—specifically, northeastern Ohio. Lewis, himself, is a school district treasurer and his wife is now a kindergarten teacher’s aide. Our grandmother was an elementary school teacher, our mother was a high school English teacher, and our sister is a fifth grade science teacher. On top of this, our father is a retired school superintendent and now a consultant. In other words, if we were able to develop a series of educational videos, we would have the proper angle to work them into the industry, gain critical feedback, and eventually potential buyers. The idea began to come so naturally to our minds, that it seemed foolish not to try it. We decided that if I could make a video, he would attempt to market it.
As the plan took off, we decided that as a pilot, we ought to focus on something simple. We had to answer some initial questions, as well. Could a film even be made by, essentially, one person? What would a film like this look like? What sort of characters would strike the interest of children? We decided to start with the simple concept of animals teaching the alphabet.

Character Designs

Back in Rochester, I was hard at work using this fresh idea as motivation to get a head start on my thesis. Though I was entirely inspired by Flash, I was not convinced that I had the capabilities yet of creating a film of broadcast quality with it. And though “To Beat the Band” gained much stylistic acclaim by my department, it did not seem to be something that would attract the interest of a child whose artistic development is minimal. They generally look to something cleaner with a more graphic quality. Something simpler, featuring characters with a sophisticated design.

I began to look into how current popular children’s television shows were created. I soon found that cartoons such as “Samurai Jack” as well as “Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends” were, to my delight, created with Flash. But the question I needed to have answered was “How?” How can these shows of such high production quality be
entirely created with a program whose main purpose in the software industry was to simply enhance the browsing experience of web pages using motion graphics?

Regardless, it was possible, and I needed to find out how.

Fellow RIT graduate student, Kristin Callahan, showed me a series of Flash tutorials found on the Macromedia website. They were produced by Flash animator Chris Georgenes, and it was from his work that I found most of my answers. One tutorial involved drawing with Flash and another explained the Flash animation process using a character composed of what Flash calls “symbols”, or rather, graphics that are added to a library and may be reproduced. They may also be minimally scaled and skewed without any loss of resolution, thanks to the vector-based foundation of Flash. That is, keeping graphics logarithmically based as to keep resolution consistent and avoid pixilation, as opposed to rasterizing. This reusability of graphics within Flash also results in low file sizes, as well ultimately, easy web streaming. From here, I decided to develop a series of characters who would share symbols such as eyes, head, and mouth shapes, thereby maintaining consistency of look, stylistic unity, and an efficient use of development time. Overall, it was my intention to establish a reusable character template.
I began working with heads. I wanted to draw something interesting, but something that I would not grow tired of myself. Since this was to involve animals, I worked with a dog character named “Buddy”. For one, he would be introduced early on in the alphabet and secondly, a puppy would be the sort of animal a child would be easily drawn to.

A first concern was whether or not Buddy ought to be quadrupedal or bipedal. Since it proved necessary to maintain consistency with each of my other characters and since my characters were essentially animals in their natural habitat, I decided to make him operate on four feet. However, my second and most difficult concern, was how to develop each character in the round; that is, front, side, back, and three-quarters views. Suddenly, this began to complicate things, since Flash is not ideally suited for three-dimensionality. I instead, limited each character to a primary side view with an occasional three-quarter perspective. This would later prove extremely interesting when plugging flat animation into a 3D background.

Professor Nancy Beiman was a crucial asset to the development of each character. In the early creation of Buddy, she suggested that I choose a breed of dog, in order to add more character and interest. The idea of a beagle immediately came to mind and “Buddy the Beagle” was born. The “beagle-ization” of my current model proved to be just the
twist it needed. Not only this, but the inquisitive nature of beagles also carefully added to the buildup of a more sophisticated character.

Overall, the graphic nature of the characters were inspired by Chris Georgenes’ Flash drawing procedure. The heavy black outline allows for an interesting variation in weight and tone while the solid fills maintain saturation and a direct point of interest in the shot composition. From there, each character was meticulously tweaked and perfected thanks to Nancy’s keen eye. Since the story now involved eleven characters, we found it necessary to develop a character line-up in order to keep a variety of color and size. Tone was eventually eliminated in order to avoid complication. Creating such a solid cast of characters was truly the film’s primary strength.

Story

The initial story was derived from the original concept between my brother and I. We wanted to keep things simple at first and operate under the notion that, “If this works, we’ll make more.” It was also an ideal way to create an initial reusable cast of animal actors.

I began by simply writing out the alphabet. Under each letter, I wrote down as many animals as I could think of, and eventually turned to the index of animal books to
strengthen the list. From there, I chose an animal for each letter that I believed I would find enjoyable to work with. I used this same procedure for vehicles and any sort of prop that could be driven. Since the story was to be about *discovery*, or at least a journey that would introduce alphabetical figures and forms, I decided that vehicles would be an excellent way of “filling in the gaps” between animals.

Once I had an A to Z list of alphabetical representatives, I was surprised and thrilled at how easily I was able to derive an initial story from it. Not only this, but the absurdity of the story made it an ideal film to be geared towards an audience of children. It was a webbing process that I had never thought of trying before and it allowed me to keep my creativity free and limitless. I was able to think of a world that I would have never otherwise thought of and it produced such a flexible cast that will definitely be reused in the future, which was essentially the whole purpose.

What the story now lacked, however, was a means of narrative delivery. I had always been a fan of the poetic rhythm of “Gerald McBoingBoing” and wondered how difficult it would be to attempt to mimic that beat. I recruited my brother-in-law, Rick Renton, to assist me in adapting my story to verse, since he has always had a specific knack for rhyme and rhythm. We discussed the lyrics to “Gerald McBoingBoing” and
found that this was an ideal way to brighten up my story. It would also eventually serve quite well in meshing with a musical beat.

**Sound**

It was now my intention to find a strong narrator and voice for the animals, or at least use a child for Buddy. I realized, however, that if I were to look outside of my immediate community, it would prove difficult finding the same people again. This idea was extremely important, after all. I was not only developing a thesis piece, but I was developing the pilot of what I was seeing as a long line of potential videos with reoccurring characters.

I have been complimented on my voice numerous times over the years and finally thought it was time to give it a try in narration. I also thought that the varying voices of the characters could finally challenge my vocal range. This would also result in a type of uniformity to the voices and an element of comedy.

Once each track was recorded, I worked with a drumbeat click-track to time out the flow of the piece into one continuous song. This simple, jazzy sounding track sparked my interest and I decided to continue working with this simple beat. The song “Fire Coming Out of a Monkey’s Head” by the band Gorillaz as well as the song “Small
Car” by Marvin Pontiac each drove my inspiration of narrating a story to a drumbeat held together by instrumental interludes. In the end, listening to the track without visuals is almost as wonderfully vivid and entertaining as watching the whole piece itself.

Animation

Since the nature of Flash is to work with symbols, I attempted to make use of this function as much as possible. Graphics such as eyes, pupils, and eyebrows could be easily used again while head shapes and legs were required to be altered slightly. I also developed a series of linguistic phonemes, eight for each character, and used the symbol swapping function in order to quickly shift between them while maintaining proper registration.

Once the majority of symbols was established, the animation process could begin. My first step was to create the cycles I knew would be reused. Basically, Flash permits you to place symbols within symbols, as well as allowing for a symbol to be a looping cycle. As a result, I created a walk cycle for each character only once, and was then able to reintroduce it countless times throughout the film whenever necessary. If a character blinked or did something that would have to be repeated, but was not necessarily a cycle, I would copy and paste frames and properly scale them to fit within the new scene.
It was necessary, however, to create each movement using "tweening" or frame-by-frame animation. "Tweening" is Flash's way of setting up a point A and a point B, and allowing for the computer to determine the in-betweens. Though not always accurate, "tweening" does in fact eliminate a tremendous amount of work, and is especially beneficial in resolving simple linear motion. And even if the "tween" is not entirely perfect, frame-by-frame alterations can then be introduced to clean up motion errors.

Animating in Flash also requires the use of the "parenting" concept. That is, breaking up figures into hinged, puppet-like characters. Unfortunately, while it is easy to maintain individual pivot points, group pivots are reset with each use. For example, the point for a wrist will remain after each use, but the point for a wrist and forearm is reset. This can prove to be terribly annoying, but not impossible to work with.

If I found that frame-by-frame movement did not suit the nature of the shot, I turned to the use of blended, warped graphics. This concept, known as a "smear", was best illustrated in the Warner Bros.' cartoon "The Dover Boys", and involves using only one frame between two extreme key-frames. The difference, however, is that the frame itself is a warped, abstracted blend of point A and point B. The result is a quick, and
remarkably fluid, movement from one pose to the next. I used this idea extensively in "To Beat the Band" and found it quite useful in this film.

Lastly, after the movement in each scene was animated, I would export it as a file sequence. It was, however, necessary to export the sequence while maintaining both color integrity and an alpha channel. The PNG picture format proved to be the perfect setting and I was at last ready to merge movement with background.

Backgrounds

The settings for my film were, at first, to be created in Flash. I had already drawn up many of the basic elements of scenes and was ready to combine my stage with the actors. At the time, I was taking a class with professor Charles Bandla. He assigned us an Adobe AfterEffects project that focused around the 3D tool. Naturally, I was skeptical of this feature in AfterEffects, since I had never taken any interest in 3D work using Maya. However, though I was quite familiar with AfterEffects, I had never even known of the feature. It essentially allows flat layers to be scaled and rotated in a 3D environment. Luckily, the limiting nature of the feature keeps things simple.

AfterEffects also provides the option of light and camera layers. These may also be adjusted to nearly any specification and adds a tremendous amount of depth to a flat,
3D space. As a result, I began to take great interest in the notion of combining my flat characters with a 3D environment. This would add an unimaginable degree of sophistication and stylistic charm to the entire piece.

At that time, professor Johnny Robinson showed me the film, “Family and Friends”. The concept of flat layers in space was beautifully executed in this piece and I used it as constant inspiration in developing proper camera movements and positioning of 2D objects in a 3D space. I used my initial class project with Charles as a technical test for this idea and the result worked perfectly. It was then my final decision to forge ahead with this procedure. This combination of Flash and AfterEffects is truly the magic of the film.

In order to add richness to my settings, however, I decided to manipulate real-life textures. I gathered photos of both natural and man-made textures, from tree bark and sky to brick and rice paper. But instead of using grass to represent grass and rock to represent rock, I attempted to insert, whenever possible, arbitrary textures that would still produce a believable object. Examples of this include using tree bark as mountain rock, and rock as glacial ice. By adjusting the contrast, brightness, opacity, and color of each layer, the results were fantastic. The natural depth and tone of each texture fit in remarkably well within each shot composition. Similarly, the light and dark contrast
complimented the use of shadows. Each landscape was a surreal creation that stretched the limits of believability.

Conclusion

"Buddy’s Alphabet Adventure" was a highly enjoyable and entertaining film to create. Since it was to be the launch pad of a future business, I kept my expectations and standards high and tweaked as many details as possible. The result is a film that cannot be watched without a constant smile on your face.

My work with Macromedia Flash has developed into not only a more solid interest in animation for fun but also animation as an ideal career move. I have begun working freelance and part-time jobs that require an extensive knowledge base of the interface and my work is highly respected. I am truly confident with pushing the limits of the program and look forward to updates and improvements in the programming. I may go to bed exhausted from a days work with it, but I wake up refreshed and anxious to sit back down.

Though I am extremely confident with Flash now, there was indeed a slight wall to overcome. I have explained to people that though the idea of timelines within timelines is a difficult concept to grasp at first, there is no better way I could possibly
think of to organize an interface. I also find myself constantly encouraging others to take the time to learn the program, as the job market for those with skill in both art/design and Flash animation is quite welcoming.

This film provided a natural step beyond my last film. And likewise, I have already begun thinking of steps to come. I now have an entire library of original characters, poses, and cycles at my disposal.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee for all of their feedback, especially Nancy Beiman, for her initial help in designing a cast of solid characters, and Charles Bandla for his help and sincere interest in my work with Flash and AfterEffects as well as his time spent working with me over the summer. Most of all, I would like to thank my brother for constant motivation as well as my brother-in-law for story and character development. Thank you all.
Appendix A
Proposal Title: "Buddy's Alphabet Adventure"

Student: Jeremy Galante

Committee Chair: Skip Battaglia
Committee Member: Nancy Beiman
Committee Member: Charles Bandla
Committee Member: Johnny Robinson

Treatment: __________ Budget: __________ Timeline: __________ Supporting Materials: __________
Credits: __________ Marketing: __________ Reel: __________

Discussion Notes:
Approval of variety of nouns, verbs, cultural artifacts for the "active alphabet";
Too long at 10 minutes; will a train be so determinant to "lock in" the cadence;
Should there be testing with children as to the entertainment and/or learning involved in this film?
Voice? Narrator (woman, child) important?

Approved: V
Date for Resubmission: __________
Not Approved: __________
Project to be Completed By: __________

Conditions of Approval:

Committee Chair (or Dept. Chair) Signature: Skip Battaglia
Date: April 18, 2005

I accept that the above is an accurate record of the conditions of approval of my Senior Thesis Project.

Student’s Signature: Jeremy A. Galante
Date: 4/18/05
Buddy’s Alphabet Adventure

By Jeremy A. Galante

MFA Imaging Arts/Computer Animation
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
April, 2005

Skip Battaglia
Skip Battaglia, Chair
Professor
School of Film and Animation

Nancy Beiman
Nancy Beiman
Visiting Professor
School of Film and Animation

Charles Bandla
Charles Bandla
Visiting Professor
School of Film and Animation

Johnny Robinson
Professor
School of Film and Animation

Approved for Submission
Title: Buddy's Alphabet Adventure  
Producer: Jeremy A. Galante  
Budget: $577.50  
Start Date: Feb-05  
End Date: Nov-05  
Running Time: 10 minutes  
Release Format: DVD  

Story:

A dog, Buddy, discovers a map that leads him on a journey through an alphabetical landscape. In the end, he discovers the treasure of friendship.

Synopsis:

The story is based upon the lower-case alphabet and introduces each letter one at a time. It will be narrated in verse and will also contain two “recap” verses - one in the middle and one at the end.

The film starts with the words “Our adventure begins.” at the bottom of the screen, in order to present the “a”. As each highlighted letter is introduced, it will also appear along the bottom of the screen.

In Abracadabria, Buddy the beagle is napping outside on his hammock. He is woken up when a coconut falls onto his head. Inside the coconut, he finds directions that appear to lead to some sort of treasure.

He begins his journey by asking his friend, the elephant, to join him. The elephant agrees, and Buddy rides on top of him.

The two friends first approach a burning house. The elephant puts out the fire by shooting out water. A goat living inside the house thanks them for their help, and joins them on their journey.

The three animals then come across a deep ocean. They decide to take the goat’s hovercraft across. When they reach the other side,
they have built up a large appetite, and decide to buy ice cream from a jackrabbit. The jackrabbit decides to join them.

The animals next encounter a large gorge. Since a bridge is out, a strong, local kangaroo offers to help carry the group and jump over to the other side. They agree, and the kangaroo continues on with them.

As they follow their path, they are stopped by an angry lion. He refuses to let them pass. A small mole, however, suggests that he might be able to tunnel under the lion for them. As a result, all of the animals squeeze through the tunnel, and the mole leads them underneath.

As the mole digs, he runs into the nose of an ostrich. The ostrich explains that he is hiding from a polar bear above ground. The group approaches the polar bear, and discover that he is in fact, friendly.

A strong snow storm now begins approaching. The polar bear offers to lead the group, now consisting of every animal except for the lion, through the blizzard. As they trudge through the snow, the polar bear cautions the group to remain quiet, as to not awaken a sleeping herd of reindeer. Once through the snow, the animals discover a sled. They all pile on, and slide down a hill.

At the bottom, the sled is abruptly stopped by the shell of a turtle. He apologizes for knocking them off, and offers a ride on his
**Title:** Buddy's Alphabet Adventure

**Producer:** Jeremy A. Galante

**Start Date:** Feb-05

**End Date:** Nov-05

**Budget:** $577.50

**Running Time:** 10 minutes

**Release Format:** DVD

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**Approach (Con’t)...**

system. This will allow for faster animation and tweening, but also the ability to squash and stretch a consistent, copied library graphic. While Adobe After Effects will be used for the primary compositing, it may also be employed in order to explore its 3D tools and allow characters to move flatly throughout an environment.
**Title:** Buddy's Alphabet Adventure  
**Producer:** Jeremy A. Galante  
**Budget:** $577.50

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**Title:** Buddy's Alphabet Adventure  
**Producer:** Jeremy A. Galante  
**Budget:** $577.50  
**Start Date:** Feb-05  
**End Date:** Nov-05  
**Running Time:** 10 minutes
**Release Format:** DVD
Buddy the Beagle
Buddy the Beagle and the Elephant
Appendix B
Our Adventure Begins

Who lived in a
can

About a seagull named

Not can "mo

Buddy's Alphabet Adventure
Scene 1
Shot 1

WHO LIVED IN A CAN

Scene 2
Shot 1

ONE DAY WHILE HE NAPPED FROM A HAMMOCK
FROM A TREE

COCONUT FELL

SOMETHING FELL ON HIS HEAD

(ZOOBS)
(KONK!)

... AND BROKE INTO A "C"

COCONUT

AS THE COCONUT BROKE INTO MANY SMALL SECTIONS

HE FOUND A MAP ROLLED UP
So Buddy followed the map.

But was stopped when he ran into a tent and passed by a tent.
Scene 4
Shot 1
They crossed over a bridge

Scene 5
Shot 1
And entered a town

Scene 6
Shot 1
When they spotted a fire

Scene 6
Shot 1
& an old goat with a frown
WE'VE GOT TO DO SOME THINGS.
scene | shot
---|---
**THE FIRE WENT OUT**
**WATER TURNING TO STEAM**

scene | shot
---|---
**LET'S COOL OFF OUR THROATS**
**& GET SOME ICE CREAM!**

scene | shot
---|---
**WHICH WAY DO WE GO?**
**WHAT DOES THE MAP SAY?**

scene | shot
---|---
**AFTER EATING FUDGE Sundaes**
**& A LARGE BANANA SPLIT...**
ONE SHOE

C.U.

JUMP OVER CLIFF

"YOU CAN'T PASS THROUGH"
"I'll make a tunnell..."

They meet bear

"I can lead you through storm!"
LION WAKES UP
DOER

P.B. TAKES THEM TO SEED

NO SNOW
MEET TURTLE

"USE MY UNICYCLE"

MOLE JUMPS ON TOP
Flat Tire

What do we do?
- Take a boat!

Viking

Too many of us!

Let's water ski!

Crash
Mole digs

You!

The treasure is you!

Animals sleep...

Z is form
## animals

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sea lion  tapir  wallabee  yak
seal  tiger  walrus  zebra
sheep  shrew  wart hog
siamese cat  weasel
skunk  wolf
sloth  wolverine
squirrel  woodchuck
vehicles

airplane  bi plane  car  dog sled  elevator  firetruck  golf cart  hang glider  ice cream truck
ambulance  bike  canal boat  cable car  canoe  crane  cruise ship  horse-back  ice skates
bus

dog sled  elevator  firetruck  golf cart  hang glider  ice cream truck

jet  jet pak  jet ski  ocean liner  pick-up truck  rocket
kayak  locomotive  monorail  pogo stick  rollar skates

jet  jet pak  jet ski  ocean liner  pick-up truck  rocket
kayak  locomotive  monorail  pogo stick  rollar skates
rollarblades  rollarcoaster
SULLIVANT CARTOONS

ANIMAL CHARACTHRIST
Appendix C