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ANIMATION-BELLRINGER:
ANIMATED SHORT

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

April 3, 2021

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Animation. It's an art medium that revolves around combining multiple images to create the illusion of movement. Such movement can generate a life of its own, entertaining and enamoring all of us. And yet, this encaptivating visual art is all done by humans through sheer ingenuity and experimentation. I've been enthralled by this form of art, wanting to learn but never knowing how or thinking I could do it. But, upon learning how we're in an age where information is available freely to almost anyone and everyone can learn through their own sheer passion and curiosity, I decided to learn how to do the thing I want to do. This project aims to tell the story of an underdog who gradually grows to become better at what they're passionate about while also reflecting my own story of growth in learning about animation and becoming better at it. The short animation, which I have named as Bellringer, is the product of pure experimentation and self-education in pursuit of becoming better at something I'm passionate for over the course of 2 years, which I hope will help inspire you or others who see this project to invest yourself into something you love on your own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All said and done, I do want to thank Professor Stuart Krieger for overseeing my project's development and growth. His experience from working in film was invaluable in making my very first film. In addition to his overvalued experience, I want to give thanks to my academic advisors, Dennis McIver, Kristy Salazar, and (former advisor) Cherrie D Veriato for enabling me to pursue this passion project in conjunction with my own studies for Political Science: Law & Society. Then there's the actual animators, from Richard Williams to Toniko Pantoja i.e. (and online video editor teacher), who provided me the necessary fundamentals to grow and learn from, providing the necessary backbone to be able to animate. And of course, my family who helped support my overall education and provided me the necessary tools to learn animation. Lastly, I just want to give some undue thanks to Honors for allowing me to try something I've always wanted to do. While this was just one animation, it was a beginning that has enabled me to continue learning and mastering this subject in my own free time.

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Project Links:

- Link 1 [Finalized Animation]:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12qF211HdC-dNPzTY0ejFVBf-dWl0YHce/view?usp=sharing>
- Link 2 [Rough Animation]:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hGuobtix78SSB-4H7TIEmuXP1YSznuRN/view?usp=sharing>
- Link 3 [Storyboard Animatic]:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ybT1n0Bem4W9O9kX7MrK2RGW_8rxvAQH/view?usp=sharing

1) Why:

I did this project, because I didn't know exactly what could be done to make an impactful difference in this community nor did I have any idea on what to uncover that had not had its stone already turned over. But I did think it stemmed from me wanting to do something that could help entertain and benefit others. Potentially, a message of sorts in the form of media. That medium would be in the form of animation.

Through this form of art, I wanted to express emotions I couldn't quite tell others to do, nor could I replicate myself. Instead, I thought about cartoons and their ability to communicate emotions with extreme exaggeration. And animation was the core principle that enabled cartoons to do just that, always stunning me and viewers with not just fascinating worlds of fiction, but characters and objects that moved with their own life and convictions. Conviction which was orchestrated and designed by another human determining these things which were intangible to physical touch, but alive to our own eyes.

More so, it was something I felt extremely passionate about. Having a love for drawing but knowing it could become so much more led me further down this path for the project. As stated above in the previous paragraph, those things about animation made me more passionate about making this project a reality. It was a way for me to pursue my own interests while providing something new and unique to Honors and something potentially beneficial to other future Honors students that try and accomplish something similar.

With that, I also felt it was possible to do something one would love with sheer dedication and passion for the subject. With that, I wanted to prove it was possible with this project I planned to make. And that project would be an animated short. A proof of concept that showed it's possible

to do something you're driven to do both in the film's message and the entire development of this project.

2) Conception:

The birth of this animated short and overall story came from a number of passes at something that could be used for the Honors Program. Originally, I had plans to make one of many extremely simple stories from my head. However, those ideas didn't come to fruition since they didn't contribute anything for other Honors students to refer to or utilize.

In turn, I went back to the fundamental key ingredients needed for the Capstone project. It was supposed to be a journey to greatness for the student, a challenge that is undertaken to contribute to something bigger, and last but not least a way of helping out those involved in the Honors program. And I thought, 'why not send a message?' And a message was developed around the theme of "self-improvement" for Honors students to utilize if they need an upbringing story or some form of guidance in animating.

The revelation soon hit me that one of those concepts and themes that the Honors Program promotes was to surpass our own limitations, putting it into something that was supposed to be for the community and/or potentially ourselves. The realization immediately hit me: it should reflect myself. With that, I went on to establish that theme of "being better" as the theme of what I wanted for my animated short. And the film's own development could become a way of showcasing my own skills alongside my main character I was creating a story about.

3) Inspiration:

There had to be some basis of a plot that evoked that dedication I sought and for me that evolved into creating a classic underdog tale. Luckily, there were (and still are, possibly more now) loads

of media that met the criteria I needed and could refer to. However, that tended to be a major problem since I had to adapt this idea to visual storytelling with no dialog. Additionally, I needed to be selective as much as possible with what each character did as well as how they did it.

My mind tossed around with multiple plots on what to use for an underdog tale where it was a silent David and Goliath tell. But one that was told purely from visuals. I sifted through various films and shows till it dawned upon me after watching the anime, *Megalo Box*. In each episode, tales of different characters overcoming their own shortcomings in life to focus on the one thing they can succeed at was consistently reaffirmed, for the protagonist, the antagonist, and all the other various supporting cast. I had struck a gold mine for brilliance and inspiration.

Now, what to use for reference material was much trickier. There was bound to be an endless array of films on fighting of the nobody who became a somebody such as Rocky or Creed to be adapted into animation, but the detail and subtle nuances in films like these was near impossible for an inexperienced newbie like me to properly refer to. Additionally, I was studying Political Science Law & Society for my major, meaning a majority of my time would be stuck to a desk reading and writing for a majority of all my time. To counteract my noob skills and time constraints, I scoured around for something simpler yet obviously exaggerated in its motions to the point you could tell what was actually happening. Luckily, I found it since I was (and still am) engrossed in it: *OK K.O.! Let's Be Heroes*. The show's action and aesthetics provided most of the foundation with what can be shown in the cartoony presentation of my animated short.

4) What:

The film (or rather short) is just a simple underdog story about overcoming an obstacle. It's all about becoming better through one's own dedication and self-improvement. It was also the same

driving factor behind my own passion for wanting to animate. A win-win in storytelling, but also a reflective outlet for projection in a well-deserved project from my own personal interests.

Apart from that, the plot is your basic by-the-books underdog story. Our little protagonist of a boxer going up against a near immeasurable opponent who surpasses them in the field of fighting with their fists: boxing. It's a relatively simple story where almost any viewer can put two-and-two together when viewing. And yet, it is a medium that can show clear expressions and messages in body language, from the experienced, abled fighter who's calm-headed and cool or a rookie underdog that's cocky and headstrong. The disparity of between the two closes near the end, showing the equal level that the two are on to indicate the on-par match to ensue.

More importantly, it was also a message for those watching to keep bettering themselves at something they can do. Whether it be a passion or a natural talent, I just figured it would be a great way of giving back to the Honor community and for telling the message I want with the established setting of boxing used in the film. As said earlier with the underdog story, every film or television show on boxing showcases the climb to the top of greatness from the pits of nothingness. Whether it be training montages or a character arc, it was the secondary plot to the imposing opponent the protagonist was aiming to fight again. The main character's progress towards a better fighter was to be a mirror of my own development into a better animator. The climax at the end of the film would not just be my protagonist's own fruitions of their labor, but mine as well thanks to properly implemented techniques and a better understanding of the workflow for making the film.

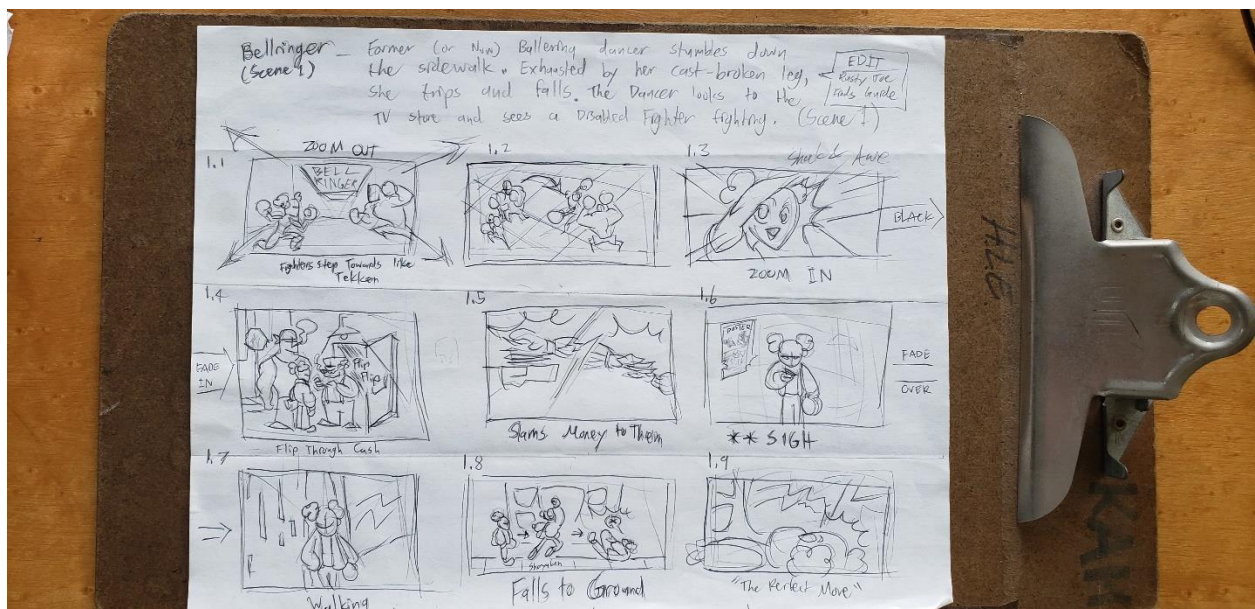
Of course, the character's own self-improvement was to be reflective of my own growth in animating. As the film begins, it's evident that not only our protagonist is inexperienced, but that the visuals are from an amateur as well. But as things progress for our protagonist's

determination and training, so do the visuals and animation as movements are not as choppy and the art is slightly more consistent than the last shot that was viewed. It's a consistency that becomes slowly noticeable, with the end having a better choreographed fight and better cinematography. The last fight reinforces almost all of the things I learned with a better understanding of them in action as evident by the short itself.

5) How:

Well, for obvious starters, I had no experience or practice in animating or storyboarding. And I had no knowledge how on how to work with the management of a one-man production team. To offset those effects, I got started on studying and practicing as early as 2018 to give the illusion of (partial) life to the characters in this short, animated film of mine.

The first step was learning how to make a short, and that lay in the tutorials of one Toniko Pantoja. I accidently stumbled upon one of his quick tutorials on Instagram. The tutorial in question was the first step in understanding the concept of momentum and movement in animation. But ignoring that for the time being, I had to learn how to create a storyboard.



(Figure 5.1)

The storyboard was and is a crucial component for the creation of any film. It is the transition from the words of the script to the images produced in the final product. But the actual story had to be written up in some format with words (a few or a lot) before I could make any pictures to visually tell the story. That process was simple, since it could be recited in a general summary that had been thought of in my head (**see Figure 5.1). However, there was a need to emphasize the action or message being conveyed. Questions on choreography popped up such as, ‘How do I show they are still an amateur?’, ‘How will it be shown that they have become better at their craft?’. Posing and dynamics in each key frame from the storyboard began to take hold as I referenced scenes and cues from the *O.K. KO Let’s Be Heroes* and *Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cartoons with their exaggerated fights and physics (**see Figure 5.2). Soon enough, the framing of the pivotal moments of could be applied and integrated to the storyboard for animating off of as a reference guide for direction.



(Figure 5.2)

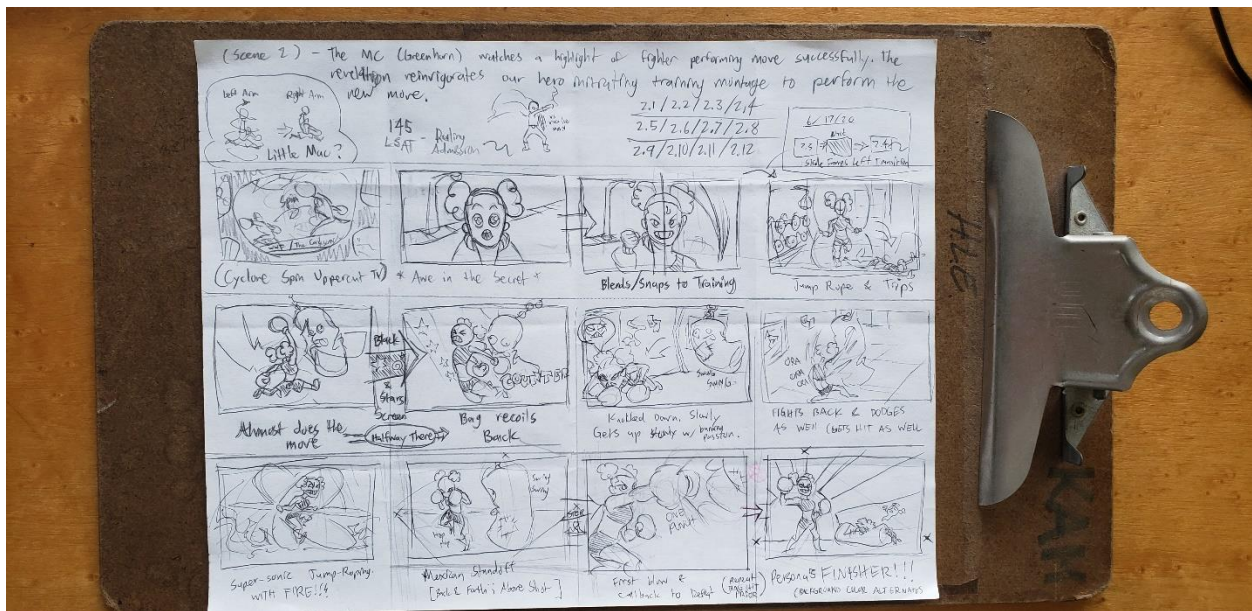
Eventually, I transitioned to the experimentation of animating and drawing on a computer, two areas I had never truly delved into. But I had almost 2 years to try and learn before my own graduation time came upon me. Best of all, I had three guides to refer to: Toniko Pantoja, Richard Williams, and the Angry Animator. Each of these peoples held concepts and lessons, alongside exercises which would be critical in animating. From the various timings in a timing chart, to the motion of arcs, and the general use of spacing, I could slowly incorporate these concepts over the course of my project's development and my own education of animation.

6) Mentorship:

Now this portion of my project's development was a really strange journey. Primarily because I ended up looking and enlisting the services of a professor I would never have picked as my first choice. That's because my mentor has no animation or drawing skills to speak of but was still able to generate art of his own volition. Instead, he created art from words, detailing narratives and stories to be set in the world of film, because he's a writer.

The story started off with me, yours truly, doing online research of the art courses that UCR had to offer regarding drawing, painting, digital art, and animation. Professors were undefined for none of them were teaching the practice of animation. This was because the majority that I had searched for in the art department were strictly teaching in the confines of Fine Arts. It didn't seem like a total loss, since I could learn to draw better to animate better potentially. However, matters were made worse as my attempts at reaching out or hailing them down online almost never went through since it seemed like my e-mails were never received and their offices were nonexistent.

Eventually all roads led to Stu Krieger, a professor of screen and television writing in the Theatre, Film & Digital Production department. Krieger's discovery came after an unsuccessful scouring of the CHASS South building, where I decided to look into other professors of the arts and films. I found a poster for "The Land Before Time," and had become extremely curious by this one poster among various other posters of socio-documentary films, asking around about its importance. It resulted in me finding someone who could provide critical evaluations of the storytelling and film-making processes. Of course, these assessment capabilities were backed up by his work on various film and television shows making my situation better.



(Figure 6.1)

What a cliché tale to tell. A down-on-their-luck character who finds help in the most unlikely of places. But it turned out to be a great choice of a mentor. Professor Krieger has had experience in not just film development, but in animation as well. He has been able to review my progress whilst ensuring that the film I had planned was consistent in its nature and appearance so that any person who saw it would be able to follow along easily (**see Figure 6.1). A blessing from out of the blue, which has helped oversee my own progress.

7) The Education (Animation, Video Editing, and Sound Design):

There was the obvious need for tutelage in this department of my project, since I had next to no experience animating or working with computers too much. So, I set out scouring various reaches of the internet to find out what I needed. Lo and behold, I had hit a diamond in the rough of bizarre animation tutorials available on YouTube from an animator by the name of Toniko Pantoja.

From Pantoja's YouTube channel, I was able to learn how to develop and set my own methodology for animating. It was almost a free education, one that required my own careful attention for understanding the concepts and fundamentals on my own. An experimentation that would prove invaluable as I slowly grew comfortable with timing. His tutorials emphasized the importance of timing, which gave weight and physics to the animation. From lofty impact which ease-outs brought and gentle softening of ease-ins kept a heightened sense of actual physics that gave some form of life. The timing simplified motions while also generating charm and character with the motion.

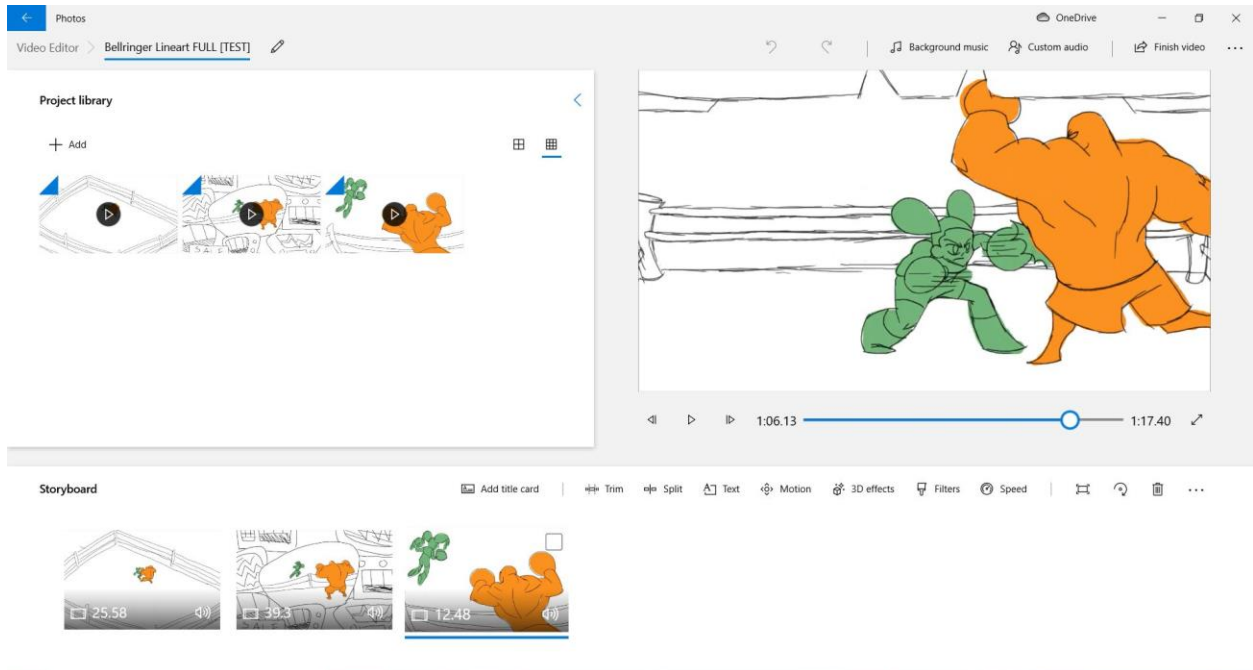
I also stumbled upon other forms of guidance in videos and books from Richard Williams, a legendary animator known for the legendary "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", the infamous "The Prince and the Cobbler", and various other animated features. From his book, "The Animator's Survival Kit", I was able to garner some important rules before being dragged away to focus on my college studies. From it, I learned basic physics of anatomy and general movement.

Everything reacts accordingly to the force being applied or exerted from the item in motion.

Williams tutelage had established rules of consistency and naturality, ensuring that movement carries weight with every action.

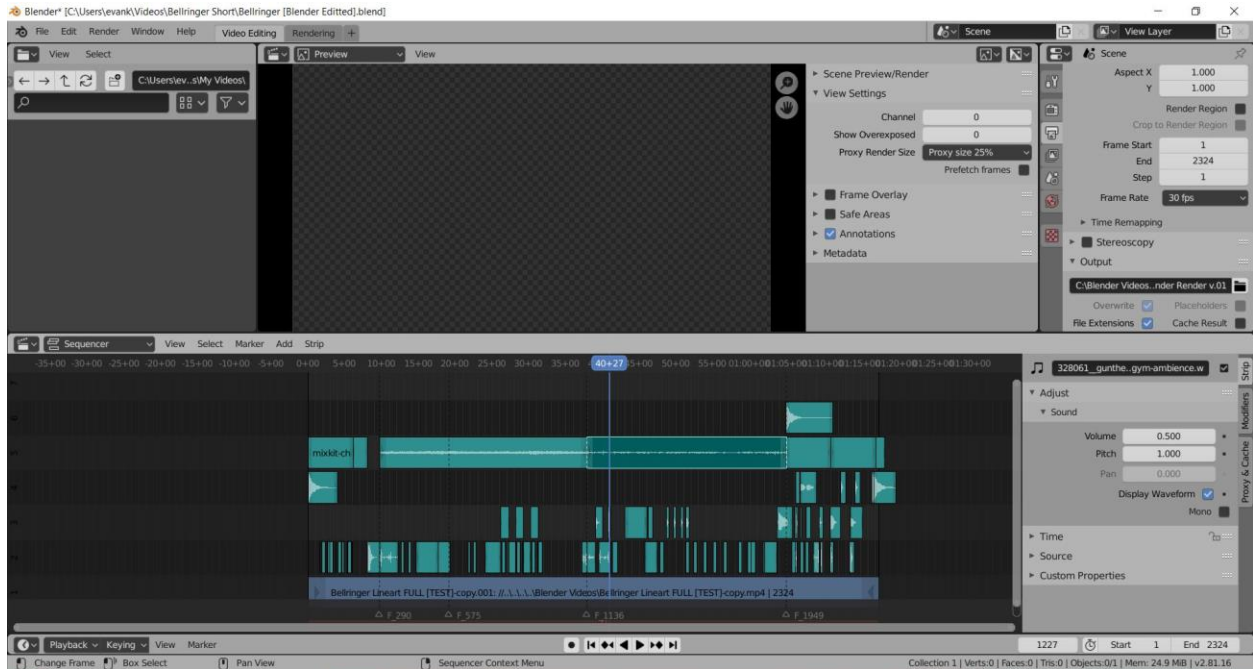
Soon I found the AngryAnimator, a website from an independent animator and resource provider. Dermot O' Connor, an animator from Dublin, managed the online page lending out materials on animation such as critical forms of spacing. Spacing was how far apart and different frames are from one another. In his explanation, he explained how items that were moving slowly needed more spacing in order to cram more frames together so that the motion or action being performed is consistent and smooth. In contrast, he stated quick and fast motions were in need of less spacing so that it goes fast since if there are few frames on screen, then they will go by fast due to the playback.

Finally, my animation lessons were condensed and re-established by the "Timing for Animation" book, by John Halas Obe and Harold Whitaker, in the UCR library. The book was an instruction manual for animating that pointed to key tricks on animation whilst reaffirming the values and concepts everyone else had expanded upon prior. It furthered on the matters of action and reaction, showing how movement is complex in its general body expression. It invigorated this idea that there more possibilities for conveying emotions thanks to how joyful actions are always bouncy and vibrant, while depressed actions are dragging with sudden movements to emphasize the heavy sluggish mass. I could now convey emotion through body language (to an extent) now.



(Figure 7.1)

My lessons in video editing weren't as informative or rather as in-depth as my animation lessons (until much later). This was because every online tutorial available necessitated a software that was too much for my laptop to handle or was out of my personal budget's price range. This all eventually led me to the utilization of a rudimentary video editor that was pre-installed on my laptop, which surprisingly got the job done well for the time (**see Figure 7.1).



(Figure 7.2)

After learning how to seam my scenes together for cohesive narration, I needed to figure out how to implement sound to make up for my strained visuals and poor art consistency, since I didn't have the time to become comfortable drawing digitally. That came in the nick of time from a YouTuber known as Christopher Lum. Lum's channel consists of various STEM related topics that relate to daily life, but also held introductory courses on how to edit videos and clips into quality videos that seemed near-professional. Soon I was able to splice frames carefully without messing up the timing and overlay sound clips upon my video without hassle as sounds overlapped as they would in real life (**see Figure 7.2).

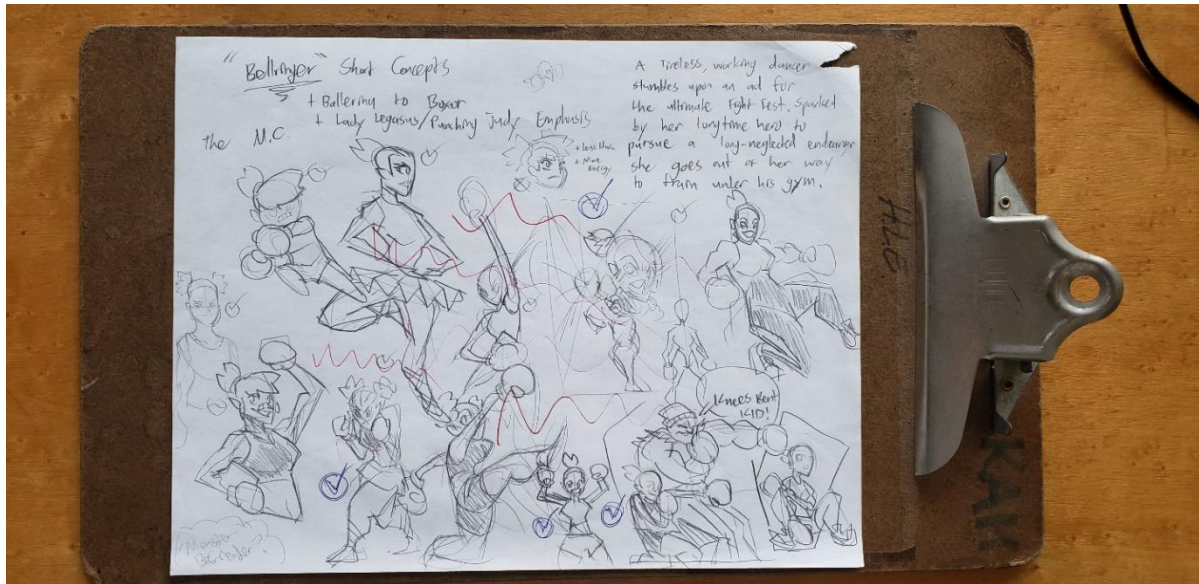
8) Development:

This entire project had to start before I could even animate. So, I went right away to drafting the ideas that I had brainstormed until I could envision in motion. It went from going on various stories that were bare bone like two cowboys in a Mexican standoff to an artist procrastinating trying to figure out what to draw. Even went so far as to tell a complex narrative based around

“opposites attracting”, but with a twist. Yet everything seemed too ambitious with each one requiring subtle nuances and movements. To offset the issue, I began to focus on media and activities that were easily obvious to draw and comprehend from any one’s vision.

There was one development issue I had to address immediately following the first portion of conception in my groundwork for making the animation. I needed to find a way to compensate my drawing skills on a computer since digital drawing was a far cry from making doodles on a piece of paper. Every little motion and gesture committed on screen would reflect on me. So, I eventually got myself a drawing tablet which would lead to some interesting events.

Character design took some work to figure out. I needed a character that was simple yet iconic to stand out in their own film. I needed to create someone who was detailed but not overly complicated to the point of requiring days to perfect for a single frame. So, I started listing off all types of boxing-themed films and shows, to get an understanding of the type of character I had and could make within the parameters I had set (**see Figure 8.1). Every piece of media I referred to always stood out with their size and head-details, making a character who could be somewhat iconic in their own right.



(Figure 8.1)

Soon I had to implement a style I could be comfortable trying to reference and draw digitally. I began referring to the simplest and most stylish animated shows that were available to me at the time, *OK K.O.: Let's Be Heroes* and *Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Shows with extremely differing flairs of style and animation, but all condensed into that same genre of action that was simplistic in its overall art.

Soon after this work had finished, I began right away on storyboarding, which took some time to nail down in its timing. Knowing how the story was supposed to be made it simpler, but just as thoughtful. I knew what needed to be shown, just not how it was to be shown. It took some sketching and paralleling key frames from those sources of inspiration I had to showcase what I wanted to tell in the right frame. Eventually it got done, and the animation and the actual education began.

9) Difficulties:

There were a couple of issues that had popped up as I worked on my project. Now, this isn't some list of advice on what you should do (entirely), since that section follows afterwards. This is a list of my trial-and-error incidents which demanded a great deal of attention. These issues ranged from commitment, adaptation, and time.

The first was commitment to the original concept. This problem plagued my development time after time when I had thought of a better concept and wanted to switch over and do it. An all-you-can-eat-buffet with constant food swapping, wherein this case was swapping of ideas. Of course, you will need to finish eating that meal/ finishing the project eventually before your time is up. It could have been better, but that's what reanimating is for since what you're doing is an initial first draft. You're testing the waters with this first idea, and it should aim to help you as a work of reference rather than be the sole item that defines your identity for life.

The second of these was learning how to draw with a tablet. My own hindsight made me think I could draw digitally with a mouse. A notion engrained by the fact it was possible to do so from my experience with digital art classes I got to experiment with in High School and the numerous pieces of artwork online made without a drawing tablet. But that changed not long after when I discovered it was harder to maintain consistency of the images between frames with a mouse, since it was like dragging a rock in the sand. The sensitivity was nonexistent with a mouse, which made using a drawing tablet a complete 180 from what I had been struggling with. It took time, but I eventually got the hang of it to some degree feeling comfortable enough to draw with some ease.

Lastly, I had to find time to commit myself to working on the project and preparing for my college courses and LSAT preparations. It was an odd tightrope, where the balance was never perfect. At times, I would be leaning far into engrossing myself into understanding the

mechanics and proper techniques for animation until much later into my final year at UCR. I had finally gained a better understanding at the cost of not fulfilling my LSAT studies on time to take the test in my last year of college. At the same time, there was so much studying that no actual practice had been properly finished leaving me to experiment with what I learned in the actual project. Had I balanced things more carefully to invest my free time 50/50 with LSAT review and studying/practicing animation, things would have been much different. Of course, I did get the project finished, just not to the expectations I had set for myself.

10) Lessons from the Experience [the Postmortem]:

For starters, the biggest lesson I learned was doing something so ambitious as my first animation project. It was a big step for any person developing their own independent, creative project. For me, it was a leap into an endless chasm with various obstacles that involved figuring out how to deal with them as they hit you. In other words, it was lots of failing to try and get to where I would be succeeding at. The three takeaways to get from reading this following passage is consistently practice, be more practical, and study film making.

Lesson one was to give yourself more activities and lessons to do when not animating. It may seem obvious, but not from my point of view since I kept focusing on prioritizing both my studies and the capstone alone, always undermining my need for practice. As a result, I was learning in my free time when I felt I could do it and figuring it out as I animated the actual project. That's because I kept reserving most of my free time for my own resting time, which was needed to an extent as I was balancing literature heavy classes which demanded a near endless barrage of reading and writing assignments. Wordy schoolwork which could drain anyone's endurance for their overall attention span. It's important that you keep persisting at something you're passionate about from different angles, whether it be menial exercises or more

research. It helps even more with burnout, since you will become stressed and bored by the progress you make, but it will benefit you in the long run with maintaining that necessary progressive growth in your project.

Lesson two, make a simpler and shorter story. It seems odd to say, especially considering how the film is about 1 minute altogether. Like, it should have been effortless for anyone. But for somebody who had no idea how to make a film properly, it was a daunting task. Almost like trying to make a three-course meal when all you know how to cook is an instant cup ramen or make a by-the-books peanut butter and jelly sandwich. More workloads that were unnecessary and easily avoidable had I taken the time to simplify the story or film into more basic and by-the-books the shots that had been animated could have been edited further or reanimated efficiently and effectively with not as much time needed.

Lesson three, master film making. And this was a statement that I imposed upon myself as I neared the end of my time at UCR along with the finishing touches on my film project. The reason was because I had little to no clue as to how to render my animation into a video correctly. It took time and effort once more to research on the subject since I was making a film, regardless of the medium it was made and shot in. There was a bigger emphasis on visual storytelling than I thought was plausible as everything had to be told from pure body expressions. There was an endless barrage of even more details I didn't know of beforehand that couldn't be addressed due to how far I was in finishing the film project.

11) Conclusion & Final Impressions on Experience:

The overall experience was an enlightening yet tough tribulation. It was a series of trial-and error functions that led to my own growth and improvement. It's a challenging road, but a rewarding

and life-changing one if you're willing to take the chance to learn and experiment. There is much more to expand on with animation, from applying it to 3D-models or visual effects. Hopefully I find the time and interest to do so in the future.

My advice is to not just treat animation as an art that's pencil and paper or computer and drawing tablet, but also as a form of film making. Because, if you're to undertake this process alone it will demand you to be both director and artist in the full range of the project's development. Hopefully, this helps you and inspires you, to whoever's seeking help in animation or starting their own creative Honors project.

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