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2D ANIMATION OF THE 21st CENTURY: THE DIGITAL AGE

by

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B.A., University of Central Florida, 2015

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
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ABSTRACT

My thesis project, entitled *The Curse Breaker*, is a personal and career venture studying the medium of 2D animation while battling my struggle with cigarette addiction. I researched and applied symbolism and narrative strategies while building an impactful hero narrative. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* provided insight into the monomyth and hero archetypes. Character and environment designs implemented symbolism as a driving focus of my thesis and fueled the semantic interpretation needed to successfully communicate my struggle with the audience in a non-verbal fashion. The language of cinematography aided in the effectiveness of my thesis film. The use of focal points and transitional wipes helped blend my film cohesively. Understanding the 2D pipeline with the production of my film, my thesis aligns with current industry demand. Large streaming companies have acknowledged this demand and invested heavily in new 2D animated content catering to children and adults.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Cheryl, Jo Anne, and Darlene, the fairy godmothers of our animation program, whose magic

imbues us with wisdom, guidance, and knowledge. Thank you!

To Dr. James F. Chambless Jr., a father whose love knows no bounds. Thank you for believing

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creativity.

To Kirstin Hardin, who pulled me out of the darkness into a world of love and light.

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis short film entitled *The Curse Breaker* creates a multilayered visual allegory using animation as a medium to personify an inner struggle with cigarette addiction. Within the film, I place an emphasis on narrative strategies, story development, and cinematography, in conjunction with hand-drawn animation techniques on a digital platform.

The Curse Breaker is a story about a mage, Hector Phaze, who attempts to break a cursed mask maliciously bound to him. Zigar Enenra, the entity responsible for securing the cursed mask, is a wicked smoke demon within the mage's subconscious. Hector enters his subconscious for his inevitable encounter with Zigar. In order to prevail, Hector must avoid Zigars' piercing chains dragging him into the darkness where the smoke demon again consumes him, thus continuing the curse.

I implemented the industry-standard animation pipeline of pre-production, production, and post-production when building the foundation in which my narrative and vision are supported. During this process, I reinforced my struggle through visual symbolism while maintaining audience immersion through cinematography.

Narrative strategies, story development, and cinematography played pivotal roles. Beginning with the narrative, I deployed strategies such as symbolism and motifs which communicated my struggle through a non-verbal visual method. This allowed focus on more of the character's facial expressions, body language, and symbols within their design, driving the narrative forward.

Researching the Hero's Journey provided a better grasp of the crucial inciting moments which propel a hero-driven narrative. Understanding I am not the only one who suffers habitually from addictions, I researched case studies on smokers' habits and cessation.

Shot selection, camera movement, continuum of motion, visual rhythm, and editing rhythm were of primary importance in conveying my narrative. By understanding the human eye and how to guide it on screen, creating a direction for immersion becomes possible. Walter Murch, author of *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective into Film Editing 2nd Edition*, provided guidance in editing my film effectively. The use of visual transitions helped create a seamless narrative while maintaining audience immersion.

I chose 2D animation as the medium for *The Curse Breaker* for several reasons. First, I believed the bridging of traditional animation with digital tools was imperative and inevitable. The trend for nostalgia dictates the resurfacing of ideas and concepts, and therefore, the integration of 2D animation into a digital medium had presented itself. Comprehension of 2D digital software such as Toon Boom Harmony and TVPaint became essential. Secondly, I am heavily influenced by 90's cartoons such as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, Disney films, and Japanese animation. Ultimately, the digital tools for 2D animation and my aforementioned artistic influences led me in devoting myself to traditional 2D animation and portraying my story in a respectful yet impactful fashion.

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Symbolism and Semiotics

"The craving and addiction drags me towards being consumed by my habitual demon."

Translating this feeling into an animated, metaphorical allegory required a proficiency in

narrative strategies. Communicating a non-verbal narrative to an audience necessitated using

symbolism as a strategy for reinforcing the narrative. Symbolism used correctly acts as a non-

verbal form of visual dialogue forming a visual language. Symbolism, as a narrative strategy,

must be appropriately used and justified. If the symbolism does not synergize with the narrative,

it will immediately pull the audience out of the immersion or offend the viewer. Paul Wells, the

author of *Understanding Animation,* explains:

> Symbolism, in any aesthetic system, complicates narrative structure because a symbol
>
> may be consciously used as a part of the image vocabulary to suggest specific meanings.
>
> Still, equally, a symbol may be unconsciously deployed and, therefore, may be
>
> recognized as a bearer of meaning over and beyond the artist's overt intentions, in other
>
> words. An animated film may be interpreted through its symbolism, whether the symbols
>
> have been used deliberately to facilitate meaning or not. (Wells, Chapter 3, Section 4,
>
> para.1)

The context in which symbolism is deployed is essential. The proper implementation of

any form of symbolism requires an understanding of semantics. Mark Collington defines

semantics as "the deeper narrative meaning produced by the grouping of objects and their specific context." (Collington) By understanding the visual language of symbols, I communicated a deeper meaning behind my narrative. Character design, environmental design, narrative arching, visual set dressing, props, camera angles, and camera movements are employed when enhancing the subliminal narrative.

Motifs

Another narrative strategy implemented was the use of *motifs*. A motif is a "distinctive and frequently used symbolic decorative pattern of images" (Wells). The action of being addicted is repetitive. Habits are repetitive. The motif of repetition is represented visually and cinematically during *The Curse Breaker*. Camera angles and on-screen orientation helped reinforce this notion of duality and cyclical behaviors. As an example, both characters emerged from an element in the center of the screen, symbolizing a rebirth. In one of the early shots of the film, the protagonist is on screen left when the antagonist emerged from a magical fire pit. During the climax, the opposite occurs when the over-the-shoulder camera frames the antagonist on screen right, and the protagonist emerges from the water on the center screen. Motifs also help communicate a visual metaphor. The antagonist chains are an example of a visual symbol reinforcing the motif of repetition.

Narrative Research

The Hero Story

The hero story narrative arc is a cycle. The hero or protagonist leads an overarching back story, eventually coming back to its point of origin. Hero stories follow a series of specific archetypal events defining the narrative. A compressed hero story can be deployed into short form by understanding those key underlining moments. Joseph Campbell provided a 17-stage formula for the hero story called the Hero's Journey.

Campbell, who studied comparative mythology, took two theoretical approaches when creating the Hero's Journey. By comparing narratives objectively from different religions, regions, myths, and folklore worldwide, Campbell built the Hero's Journey based on the corresponding narratology and semantics (Collington). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the published work of Campbell, identified the hero's journey as the "standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero" (Campbell). Campbell partitioned it into three phases: the departure, the initiation, and the return (Campbell). The hero's adventure starts with the protagonist's departure or separation. They become initiated or indoctrinated through a series of trials when returning and/or being reborn with newfound knowledge or power (Campbell). Within each *phase* of the Hero's Journey, Campbell details the corresponding steps or events thematically symbolizing each stage of the hero's adventure. Each stage of the *Hero's Journey* or *Monomyth* is reinforced with a narrative archetype. The steps of the *Hero's Journey* have thematic responsibilities to the hero narrative and character development for which the narrative

is propelled forward. Through the cycle of these events, the hero's narrative is structurally guided.

Based on Joseph Campbell's formula, *The Curse Breaker* depicts the hero's narrative archetype entitled the Refusal of the Call. This narrative archetype is symbolic of my craving and addiction to cigarettes. I am ultimately trying to quit my habit and refuse the call. At first, I believed my story followed the Belly of the Whale archetype. I found this incorrect as the belly of the whale archetype required the hero or protagonist to be consumed by a metaphorical whale or creature. An example is the story of Jonah and the whale, where the tale symbolizes rebirth in the Western Christian Bible (Campbell). Joseph Campbell's narrative archetype of the Refusal of the Call says:

> The myths and folktales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's interest. The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one's present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure. (Campbell, Part 1. Chapter 1, Section 2, para.4)

My character's interest is breaking the cursed mask while refusing to give up and submit again to the demon. This metaphorically symbolizes my refusal of the call of the craving. After reading *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, I identified the narrative stages' theme or purpose and applied it to *The Curse Breaker*. Campbell's formula reinforced my film's thematic narrative and

symbolism, which helped finalize my visual symbolic representation of my struggle with cigarette addiction.

Addiction Research

Addictions are controlling; "an all-consuming obsession," says Judson Brewer, author of *The Craving Mind,* forward by Jon Kobat-Zinn. Dr. Brewer refers to addictions as habit loops. Judson Brewer MD, Ph.D., is a world-renowned psychiatrist treating addiction with mindfulness techniques (Brown University). Currently, Dr. Brewer is the Director of Research and Innovation at the Mindfulness Center at Brown University and an associate professor at Brown's Medical School in Behavioral and Social Sciences at the School of Public Health and Psychiatry.

Dr. Brewer teaches his patients to map their habit loops through mindfulness techniques. This map creates awareness of what triggers their craving, the behavior associating the habit or trigger, and the reward it provides. Judson Brewer provides a mindfulness approach to cigarette cessation. His two-year smoking cessation study with mindful techniques proves more of his patients successfully continue their cigarette cessation after stopping versus the *Freedom from Smoking* group guidelines for smoking cessation by the American Lung Association (Brewer). Brewer expresses a great deal of his interest in craving behaviors and the relationship with smoking. This relationship points back synonymously with a trigger "being clearly linked as part of the habit loop" (Brewer).

The human body's respiratory system is a priority on everyone's health list, as the surge of a new virus, COVID-19, plagues the United States and the world. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. This disease attacks the respiratory system, primarily

affecting the lungs, causing shortness of breath, dry cough, and even pneumonia (OSH). One of the three ways somebody contracts COVID-19 is through breathing in air particles contaminated with the virus (OSH), i.e., someone coughs without covering their mouth, putting anyone in the vicinity at risk of inhaling particles expelled from the lungs. A smoker is considered at greater risk of being severely ill from COVID-19 by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC lists the following as high risk: smokers, current or former, and others who have other underlining health conditions, such as cancer, chronic lung diseases, heart diseases, pregnancy, diabetes, immunocompromised stated (weakened immune system), and other compromised pathologies (OSH). The COVID-19 virus initiated a pandemic in December 2019 and put a strain on global society. Governments mandated lockdowns of their citizens to stop the spread of the contagious virus. Guidelines were implemented for helping people stay safe and healthy, such as social distancing, face coverings, and isolation periods (OSH).

The damage of smoking increased my anxiety and propelled me to smoke more. It was a never-ending cycle. The awareness of the repercussions made me negligible and held me accountable, while the grip of addiction locked me into helplessness. My struggle with addiction is one I chose for communicating through animation. In a dark fantasy portrayal of my metaphysical struggle with addiction, I adapted my struggle into a hero story with intentional hopes of inspiring and motivate those who suffer from an addiction and breaking away from their habitual demons.

STORY DEVELOPMENT: SEMIOTICS IN STORYTELLING

Plot Devices – Semantic Vehicles

The Curse Breaker has several plot devices driving the story, many of which reinforce my thematic element of repetition. One example of a plot device is using a cursed mask for the hero character. The mask is similarly integrated into the demon's design. This reiteration creates a visual correlation between the protagonist and antagonist. In a later sequence of the film, the hero gets dragged under the dark water, thus revealing a sea of masks floating around him, reinforcing the notion of repetitive action. This sequence illustrates the cyclical meeting between the protagonist and antagonist while building on a similar idea as a monoscenic synchronic narrative, bringing together past, present, and future (Collington). I represent this idea through an animation sequence instead of a single image. Structuralist Levi Strauss refers to the synchronic term describing bringing all narrative elements together at one moment in time (Collington).
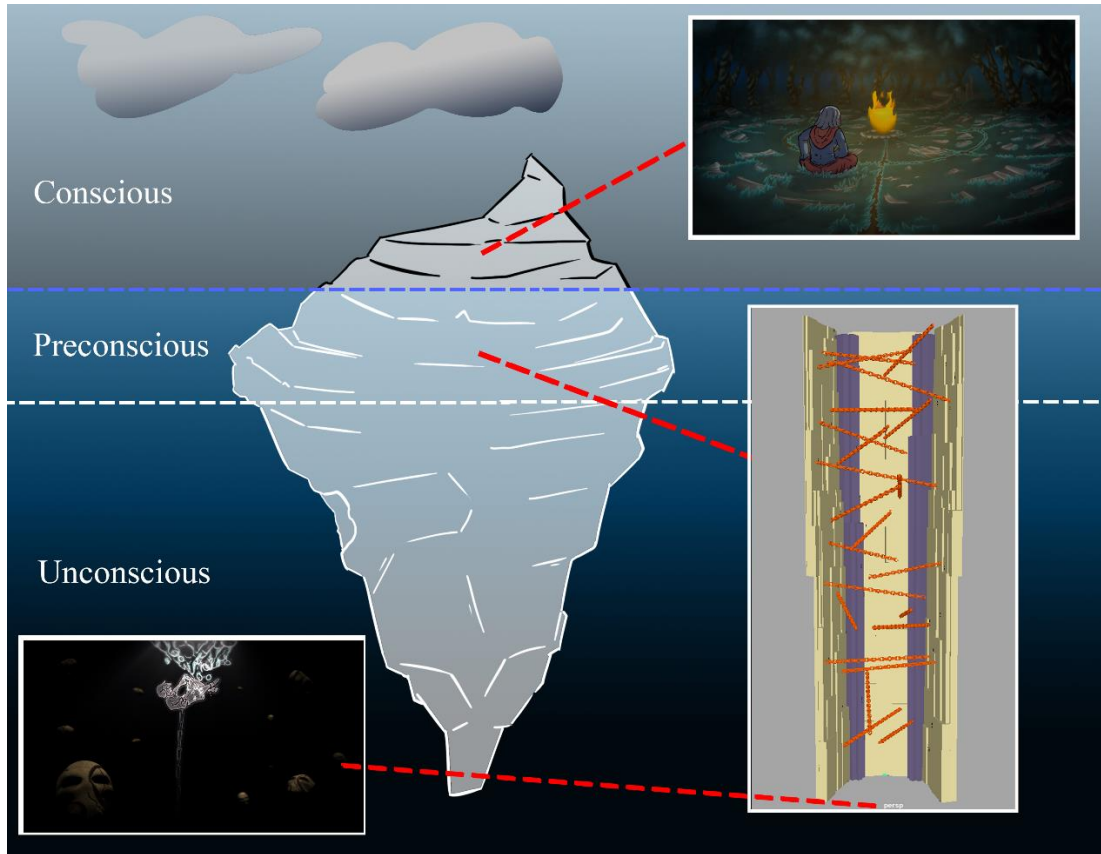
Figure 1: My environmental layout according to Freudian topographical map of the conscious mind.

Source: James Chambless III

Freud's model of the conscious mind offers a visual reference or blueprint for my metaphysical environment. The three-layer diagram of an iceberg visually represents the three cognitive layers of the mind: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The top tip of the iceberg on the water's surface is the conscious reality. The second layer, representing the preconscious mind, occupies the section of the iceberg closest to the waterline. The furthest

block of the submerged iceberg represents the unconscious mind, and the surrounding water represents the unconscious (Davey).

The Forest of Echoes represents my narrative's environment's conscious layer and physical reality. I depict the character's subconscious, the metaphysical mind, as a massive well with a small platform at the base which composes the preconscious and unconscious layer. The preconscious layer is where the events of the narrative take place. The depths of the subaqueous environment of the well represent the unconscious. Here, floating masks symbolize a visual representation of habits and the notion of recurrence.

Worldbuilding – Exterior Environments and Research

Figure 2: Forest of Echoes.

Source: James Chambless III

The Forest of Echoes mimics Aokigahara Forest in Japan. The environment contains an evergreen forest with a small, grassy opening. Metaphorically, the open field serves as a false

sense of freedom, however, deep foliage and trees surround the area like a fence. The fence

separates him from the outside world, acting as a lively shell with a hollow center.

At the base of Mount Fuji lies Aokigahara, which National Geographic entitles Japan's

Ethereal Forest (Keefe). Aokigahara features a dense, lush forest with disorienting terrain make

it easy to become lost. Large trees with winding roots and thick green foliage covering

mountainous, steep hills make travel extremely difficult. This forest has an alias with a darker

connotation: The Suicide Forest. There are local legends of people practicing *ubasute,* which

means "taking an elderly relative up into a remote area and leaving them to die" (Keefe). The

lush foliage surrounding the world of my hero references this forest and the mysterious

disorientation dwelling within.

Worldbuilding – Interior Environment and Research

Figure 3: Well environment.

Source: James Chambless III

The second environment is in the protagonist's subconscious. Here, the protagonist faces the antagonist in a metaphysical struggle. A vast well depicts the subconscious setting. It emphasizes the protagonist's internal struggle and emotional state. The well has large chains hanging from the walls, a direct reference to the antagonist and symbolizes his control of the hero's mind.

At the base of the well, there is black water with a single concrete circular slab at the center. The concrete slab is the only footing for the hero within his subconscious. According to the Freudian topography of the conscious mind, this concrete slab serves as the stage for the preconscious mind. The preconscious layer is aware of recent memories, behavior patterns or habits, and understanding urges, such as cravings (Roth). This environment symbolizes the cognitive awareness of addiction and smoking habits.

The connected chains throughout the environment reinforce this notion. Habits and behavior patterns do not originate in the preconscious mind. The unconscious layer is the deepest layer of the unconscious mind. This layer of the mind is where one is unaware of the cognitive process and storage. The unconscious layer can be thought of as the involuntary nervous system of the conscious mind. This is where behavior and habits form, instinctual reactions occur, and impulses, such as fear, aggression, or pleasure, stem from the mind. According to Sigmund Freud, behavior patterns, habits, long-term memory, and instincts are developed as early as in infantile stages (Roth).

Protagonist - Hector Phaze
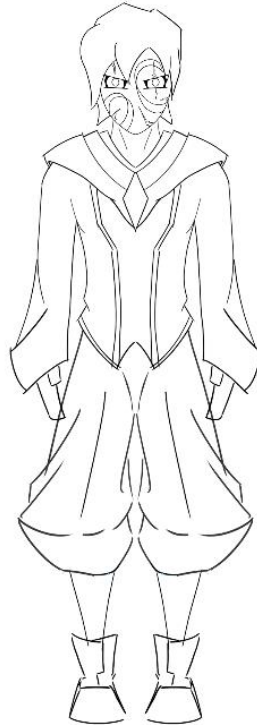
Figure 4: Character design of the protagonist.

Source: James Chambless III

Hector, a mage specializing in magic curses, attempts breaking a 300-year-old cursed mask placed upon him by a demon. In the past, he is unsuccessful at breaking the curse or defeating the demon dwelling within, but that does not stop him from trying.

Curse Breaker
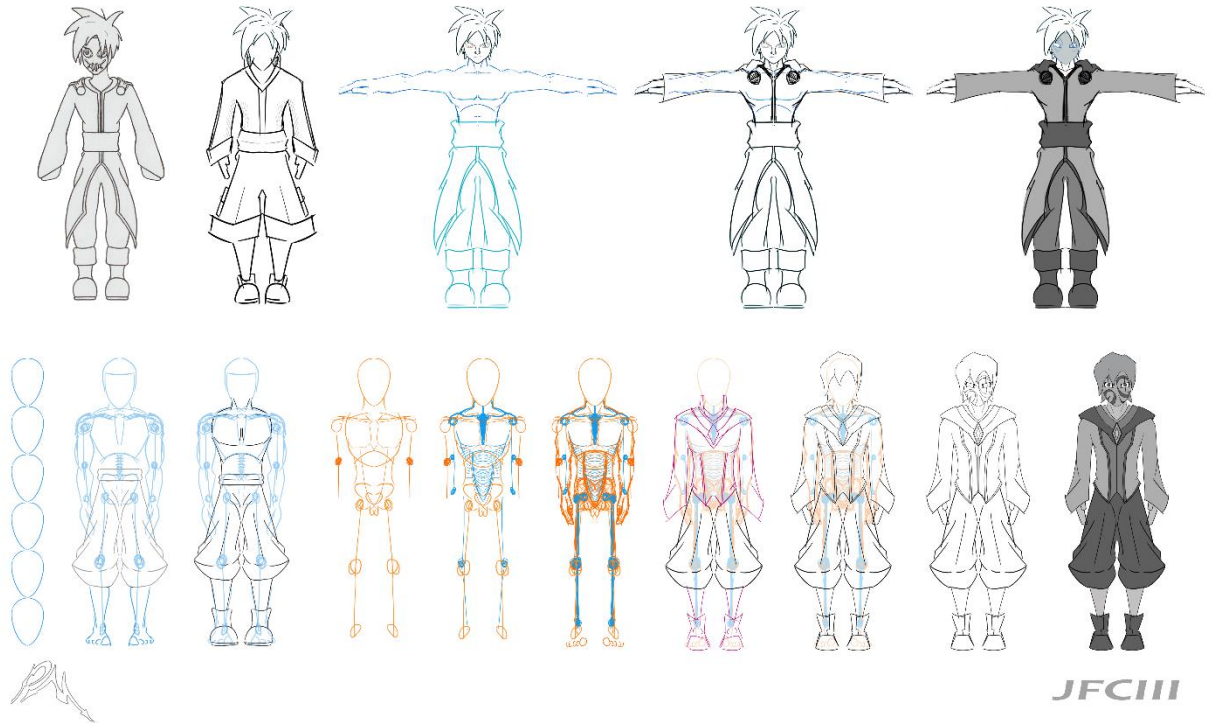
Figure 5: Character design progression with anatomical and physiological structure.

Source: James Chambless III

The hero is a direct representation of myself and the frustration with the cycle of cigarette addiction. His design stems from his experience in enlisting a magical military force. This is representative of the hero's physique. Despite being physically adept, Hector's struggle with the demon makes the narrative of his background story more appealing. He is not designed as a traditional mage, with a pointy hat and long robes. He wears shorts and a hooded jacket. His shorts signify his freedom roaming as he pleases. He is not dirty or decrepit, meaning he actively participates in his society, displaying the cursed mask for the world to see.

I researched Japanese folklore and based my character archetype on a historical figure named Abe no Seimei. Seimei, who lived during the Heian period (Shigeta), was an *onmyōji* who specialized in the practice of *onmyodo* (Shigeta). *Onmyodo* is called The Way of Yin and Yang, which is based on the Chinese philosophies of Yin and Yang and Wu Xing (five phases) (Makoto). Abe No Seimei's attributed much of his folklore to supernatural or magical powers. *Onmyōji* were known to see spirits and demons and oversaw performing rituals to exorcise demons (Shigeta).

Antagonist - Zigar Enenra

Cursed Demon
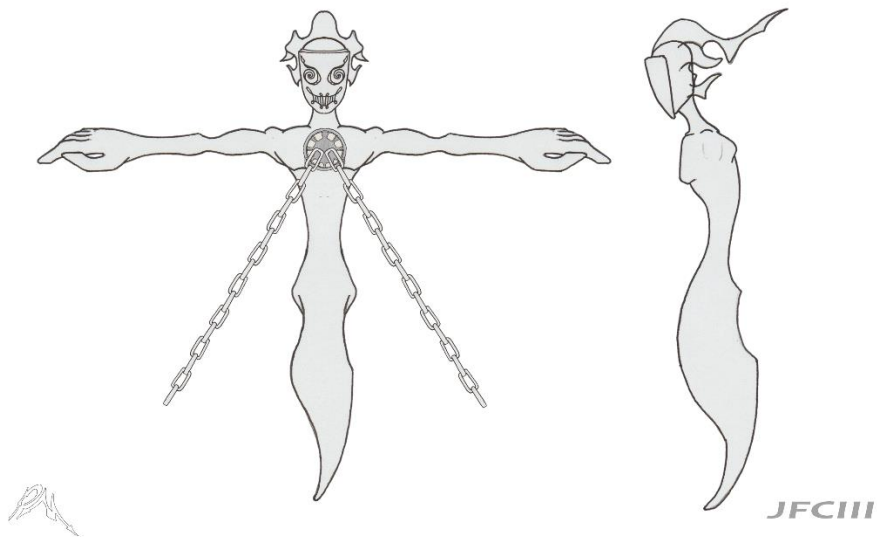
Figure 6: Character design of the antagonistic demon, dwelling within Hector, taunting and torturing him as a form of entertainment.

Source: James Chambless III

Symbolic expression is "given to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions underlying the conscious patterns of human behavior" (Campbell). For my thesis film, I utilized 2D animation as a medium when creating a visual representation of addiction by showing the struggle one goes through when attempting to quit their habit. I generalized the story by not focusing specifically on cigarettes but instead focused on the habit and grip addiction has on a person. By doing this, my story can connect to a broader range of audiences, stimulating emotion and relevancy. This led me to the personification of my addiction through my demon's design.

Zigar Enenra is a humanoid entity created entirely of smoke, two large chains, and a series of smaller chains. In the center of his chest, there is a large mouth consuming the chains. Zigar wears a mask, a characteristic he shares with Hector. The mask represents the ownership he has over Hector, metaphorically representing myself and my addiction. In addition to ownership, the mask symbolizes feelings of stifling isolation and identity loss. The chains symbolize anxiety, binding Hector to Zigar as my anxiety binds me to my cigarette addiction. The mouth on Zigar's chest represents the craving and reinforces the notion of anxiety. The mouth chewing on the chains is representative of my anxiety feeding my addiction, and thus creating more anxiety.

CINEMATOGRAPHY: THE RHYTHM OF EDITING

Cinematography is the language of the cinematic lens through which visual narratives are told. While putting together an animated sequence of two minutes at twenty-four frames per second, I needed to make sure I would have my audience's full attention. The juxtaposition of sequences must be assembled appropriately and therefore communicate my theme efficiently.

Cinematic Research

Walter Murch, author of *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing 2ⁿᵈ edition*, provides insight into his experience as a film editor in Hollywood. Murch's work includes *Apocalypse Now* and *The Godfather, Part II* with Francis Coppola. In his book, Murch discusses the Rule of Six, six key factors to prioritize when editing. The Rule of Six is set up to guide the story. The first on Murch's list is emotion. Character emotions connect best to people, having their expressions direct a reaction. Second on the priority list is to "advance the story," as Murch describes. The third priority is rhythm, the right moment per se (Murch). Eye trace refers to the focal point and eye movement (Murch). The final two on Murch's Rule of Six lists are 2D composition and 3D spaces. The two-dimensional composition includes components such as the horizon line in a shot. Three-dimensional space is the correlation of objects within a space (Murch).

The Cinema Cut and the use of Transitions

The best cut or transition between sequences is the one the audience never notices. The best cut will never receive the acknowledgment it deserves, only of a silent bat of an eye. The cut should emulate the blink of your eyes—a natural involuntary psychological movement. By bringing attention to the cut, or the blink, it is no longer involuntary, causing a stream of consciousness questioning the authenticity of what is being experienced on screen. This occurs in film and animation when a cut is improperly placed or shifts the focal point drastically.

The use of cinematic transitions helps blend shots. When properly used, one can seamlessly mask the cinematic cut between sequences. Examples of transitions are jump cuts, fades, dissolves, and wipes. I use several wipe transitions to blend cuts. A wipe transition helps reset the focal point for the audience. An example of a wipe transition is the stereotypical page turn. Disney films such as *Cinderella* and DreamWorks's *Shrek* use this transition when entering the fairytale world. In *The Curse Breaker*, I use the natural elements of earth, wind, and water as transitional wipes ushering in cinematic cuts and reinforcing symbolism.
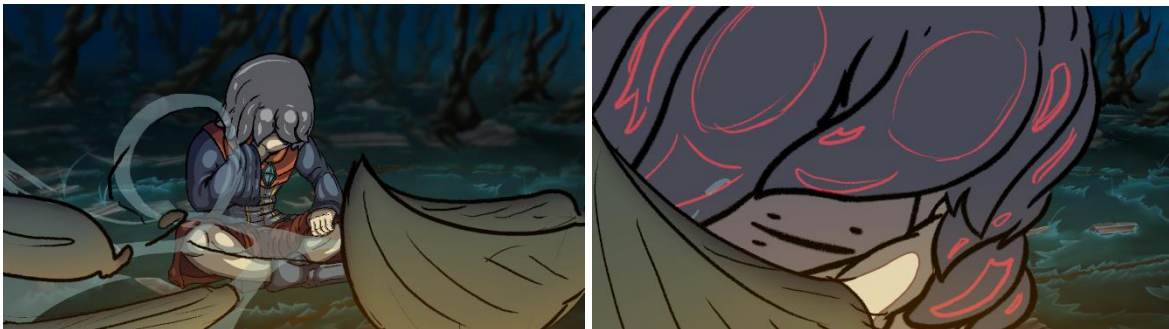
Figure 7: A gust of wind foreshadows the inevitable meeting. Hector is represented by the leaves and debris caught in the wind.

Source: James Chambless III

<u>Empathy</u>

Creating empathy is a must so that the audience relates to the character. Additionally, it is the driving message of my thesis film. To develop empathy, I use camera techniques in conjunction with an impactful audio score, close-ups and extreme close-ups create a more resonating sequence focusing on my protagonist's emotions. By utilizing close-up shots, the audience becomes connected with these sequences and to the character's emotions.

During close-up sequences, I portray the emotions of sadness, determination, and anger towards the demon and the hero's curse. I choose showing these emotions because I feel all emotions due to my addiction. Sadness reveals when I think I cannot control my addiction. When attempting to stop my habit by facing my fear, I think of determination. I feel anger when I try quitting and fail. These emotions can be related to both an addict and an unafflicted person. The close-up sequences signify the iterative events in which my character starts a new defense or action against the demon and the curse.

Figure 8: Shot 044 symbolizes the rebirth of the hero as he regains control over his world.

Source: James Chambless III

Visual Pacing Rhythm and Audio

Cinematography has visual pacing and rhythm harmonizing with your narrative. Grasping the rhythm in which your story is told is imperative to inducing cinematic immersion. This is an experience that comes to one as a feeling. Comparative to dancers understanding rhythm and choreography and musicians understanding the melody's tempo, editing requires the same sense of visual rhythms. Sign language is an example of visual rhythm. Visual dialogue with the deaf, through sign language, is a rhythmic exchange of physical hand gestures, facial expressions, and body orientation (Belsky and Cartwright). This is a form of rhythm that does not rely on the auditory senses.

The Curse Breaker does not have an audio foley track. However, using diegetic and non-diegetic audio is a notion of great importance. Diegetic audio signifiers can deliver audio from the right speaker, thus signifying the camera panning to the right, identifying the source. Another example is a shaking door handle or a car pulling up in a driveway that draws attention off-

screen. Diegetic audio strongly reinforces visual storytelling methods. In my film, I utilize

continuous musical composition, therefore bolstering the narrative. The non-diegetic piece helps

lead the story early in the movie while becoming an accent to the intense animation in the later

climactic sequence. My choice for non-diegetic audio evokes a strong sense of emotion without

the interruption of foley audio. By not having a diegetic audio track, I help maintain visual focus

on the character and the animation. Meanwhile, the audio retains a peripheral cruise control over

the auditory senses.

<center>Story</center>

The story must continuously be the driving point. Various visual storytelling methods are

deployed in my thesis film to navigate the story. The combination of dynamic and static cameras

cycle through visual intensity while providing time for a narrative perspective. I manipulate the

story's pacing in key narrative moments intensifying the story and facilitating an emotional

response. For *The Curse Breaker*, I use memory frames, a transition used in the match cutting of

a sequence.

Director Osamu Dezaki is the creator of the postcard memory technique (Dennison). This

technique exaggerates a specific moment in the narrative, making it more impactful through a

single, highly detailed freeze frame. Helping the match cut transition into a memory frame, the

incoming frame is typically completed in a different medium for contrast. Additionally, they

serve as a strategy for visual narrative compression. Using the postcard memory frames

sequentially, I guide the narrative through the pacing of the images, which act as a montage,

evoking an emotional response.

<center>22</center>

Japanese animation has utilized the postcard memory technique for iconic moments in shows, such as *Cowboy Bebop*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Gurren Lagann*. The postcard memory has been used for comic relief by adding a visual sense of realism to the art style. Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* uses the memory frame in this fashion. Postcard frames are usually accompanied by a Ken Burns effect, a pan or zoom across flat artwork. This is advantageous for my thesis film as I deploy postcard memory frames in the form of cinematic montage which incites cognitive responses acknowledging the critical moments.

Figure 9: His tenacity looms over him one last time. Hector lifts himself in an emotionally frustrating manner to give a stern stare toward the demon.

Source: James Chambless III

Russian modernist filmmaker Lev Kuleshov created Montage theory (Collington). The use of montage is a form of visual narrative compression. These moments intensify the story and express my character's emotions to the audience. The proper use of the montage allows the

narrative to be felt, reinforcing the story as an experience. This develops a more engaging

narrative moment than an aesthetically passively perceived narrative (Collington).

In *The Curse Breaker*, the memory frame transition allows the audience to consciously

acknowledge the change in the visual medium and interpret the narrative's progression. The

implementation of postcard memory frames is the only intentional technique I use to engage a

conscious response from the audience evoking an omni-immersive experience of the narrative.

<u>Focal Point and Leading the Eye</u>

The interpretation of cuts should be seamless. Attention is diverted away from the

cinematic transition by giving the audience's eye somewhere to lock on to in a shot (Murch). The

eye can adjust efficiently by match-cutting the focal point with the following sequence. Creating

focal points will guide the eye between sequences, showing the audience where to look on

screen. Directing the eye requires contrast for separating the character from the background. This

is accomplished through motion and animation. The subtle multi-planing of background images

with the fluid animation and lighting of the character creates the focal point. In conjunction with

lightning and other dynamic effects, light directs the eye from one focal point to another through

an axis formed by the animation along with the screen, preparing the eye for the next focal point.

Another method of directing the eye is speed and motion. By creating a focal point

through motion, I compositionally draw the audience's attention to a specific point on the screen,

then have it trace the animated focal point across the screen to the location of the next focal

point. For my symbolism to be interpreted non-verbally, the theme relies on the eye seeing

precisely what is intended.
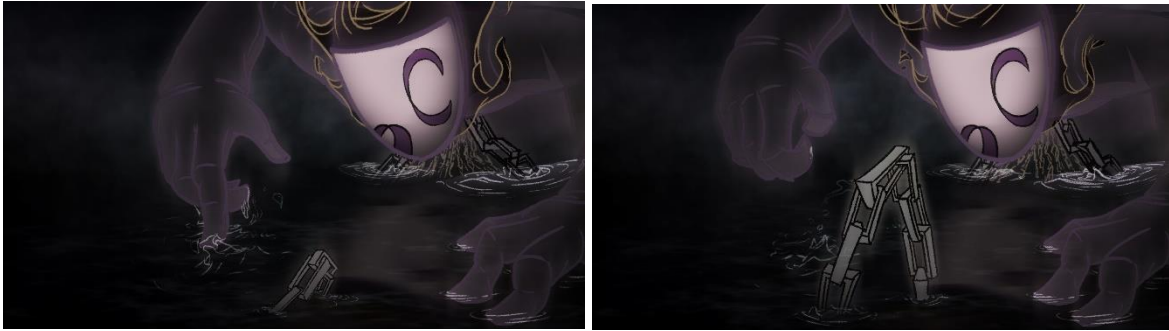
Figure 10: The antagonist lifts the chains of addiction out of the depths. The unconscious level is where fear, immoral urges, and selfish needs are stored.

Source: James Chambless III

<u>The Anime Machine – Cinema Research</u>

Thomas Lamarre, author of the *Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, provided insight into animetism and cinematism for symbolic representation. Lamarre discusses the "by standing lens" with shifting planes and the dynamic environmental camera of an incoming object in his book. Animetism refers to planes' shifting, emphasizing the camera independent of the environment. The camera in animetism gives the illusion of "passing by" the world or environment, contrasting with Cinematism, which requires the camera passing through (Lamarre). Essentially, animetism is about the lateral movement of image planes in and between surfaces instead of about movement into depth (Lamarre).

Figure 11: The use of animetism gives the illusion of large clouds slowly swirling inside the environment.

Source: James Chambless III

Cinematism is the intensification of a one-point cartesian perspective (Lamarre); Cinematism requires the camera mimicking a bullet perception or camera point of view as it dynamically travels through an environment (Lamarre). Cinematism involves perceiving space collapsing the distance between camera, viewer, and target. Typically, the camera is an apparatus driven by force towards an object (Lamare).

Figure 12: The cinematism in this sequence symbolizes impending doom. Cinematism evokes a hierarchy of power as the apparatus (camera) perception comes from the superpower or entity in control.

Source: James Chambless III

Animetism and cinematism are not considered distinct to specific genres as they are based on the theory of perception relative to camera focus and movement (Lamarre). Both approaches can be applied to live-action cinema and animation. When applied to cinema, the theories reveal the opposite of animation. Cinema hides the gap, reducing the notion of a low-budget production (Lamarre). The live-action film industry blends the gap between reality and digital space by using green screens and compositing. Animation provides a better cinematic platform when exploring the use of image planes in the form of symbolic representation. The use of animated multiplane images embraces the separation of digital space in support of creating the illusion of atmospheric depth on a flat surface.

Lighting

Figure 13: Still image from Shot 013 with magic falling effect.

Source: James Chambless III

Lighting is used to direct the eye with effects. Light is one of the central dynamics for attracting the eye and guiding the audience's focus. Environmental lighting plays a vital role in the subconscious for *The Curse Breaker*. A fog of slowly turning smoke diffuses dim environmental lighting. The fog gives an atmosphere of mystery to the protagonist's subconscious. It acts as a second metaphorical wall of the subconscious, precisely that of the invading demon-antagonist, which contrasts with the physical walls belonging to the protagonist.

MODERN ANIMATION

2D vs. 3D – Choosing the Correct Medium

I chose hand-drawn 2D animation as my medium when adapting my struggle into my thesis film. I kept the use of 3D in my process as a tool for creating dynamic camera angles and an accurate cartesian perspective of depth in my environment. Having a 3D environment for 2D animation was advantageous because utilizing a 3D space for reference provided a way of understanding the foreshortening of objects and dynamic cameras. The 2D animated chains proved to be a time-consuming venture. 3D chains would have been more efficient.

Narrative Influences – Japanese Animation

Japanese animation played an enormous role in influencing my imagination and thesis. Japanese shonen shows, catered toward a young male audience, influenced my teenage years. Cartoon Network's *Toonami* broadcasted Japanese animated shows to a Western audience. TV shows such as *Dragon Ball Z*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Gundam Wing* provided daytime programming. Adult Swim, airing during the nighttime for mature audiences, had Japanese animated shows such as *Cowboy Bebop*, *Trigun*, and other uncensored versions of *Toonami's* daytime broadcast. Other Japanese shonen that has inspired me include *Naruto*, *Naruto Shippuden, Bleach,* and *One Piece*. These hero-driven stories followed similar hero arcs and hero archetypes of the cosmogonic cycle and ultimately influenced my imagination when creating my own hero-driven story.

Japanese animation has for years been available through online streaming services from Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Crunchyroll. Japanese animation has created largely successful shows throughout animation history. Director Hayao Miyazaki especially made Japanese animation known to global audiences. With Miyazaki's animated studio, Studio Ghibli, he created the acclaimed 2D animated films *Spirited Away* and *Castle in the Sky*. He has provided a focus for Western media on Japanese animation.

<u>Animation Techniques Principles and Software</u>

Animation has always used physical technology when compiling all the images together. This remains true today as 2D animation finds its place in the digital culture, adapting to technological advances. Toon Boom's Harmony and TVPaint are two of the top 2D animation software programs. Toon Boom's Harmony is the industry standard software providing vector-based animation. Harmony has node-based compositing and 3D capabilities. In my experience, TVPaint, a raster-based animating program, is straightforward and more user-friendly. TVPaint's brushes are what separate it from Harmony. However, since TVPaint is raster-based, it makes transforming, scaling, and shifting images difficult. Raster art pixelates and blurs when scaling or transforming an image.

TVPaint

TVPaint caters to a more traditional approach to animation through digital software. The timeline layer-based system makes easy reading of the complex layers of animation that may

otherwise be small or compressed in software such as Toon Boom's Harmony and Adobe's Animate. TVPaint accommodated my animation process from storyboarding and rough animation to tiedown animation and clean-up during production. In the postproduction process, digital ink and paint, lighting, and animated effects are applied to the sequence. After revising my composite strategy, I approached my thesis film differently by adding lighting during postproduction. This revision came after I felt the character's colors were too flat and required more volume. The black outline of the character helped provide contrast to the environment. Nevertheless, the sequence and character were still missing something essential.

I originally wanted lighting done during the compositing process. However, procedural and software lighting imitates lighting and only works based on the contour of an image. Procedural or software lighting provides a sense of global illumination outside the image. Inward volumetric of lines is not possible, limiting the range of realistic lighting created in 2D software. If one cuts out the inner contour of an image, lighting can be applied separately, thus mimicking a cross contour volumetric lighting. This is a technique I utilized when finalizing the look of my demon character. By making separate layers for illumination in conjunction with toon shaders, a procedural lighting system was applied consequently creating a texture lighting pass comparable to a 3D ambient occlusion render. Netflix's *Klaus*, directed by Sergio Pablos, employed a similar technique when making the final rendered look of the film (Failes). This method allowed for a realistic lighting blend and volumetric texture with 2D animated characters. For the protagonist, I ended up using a different technique of hand drawing the lighting within TVPaint. I adopted a cel-shaded style for the hero providing a sharp outline on the shadows instead of a soft blend gradient of the penumbra. This provided an additional contrast between the smoke demon and

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Hector using two different lighting methods. With these techniques, I finalized the aesthetic look

of my characters. An example of my TVPaint layer system is provided below.
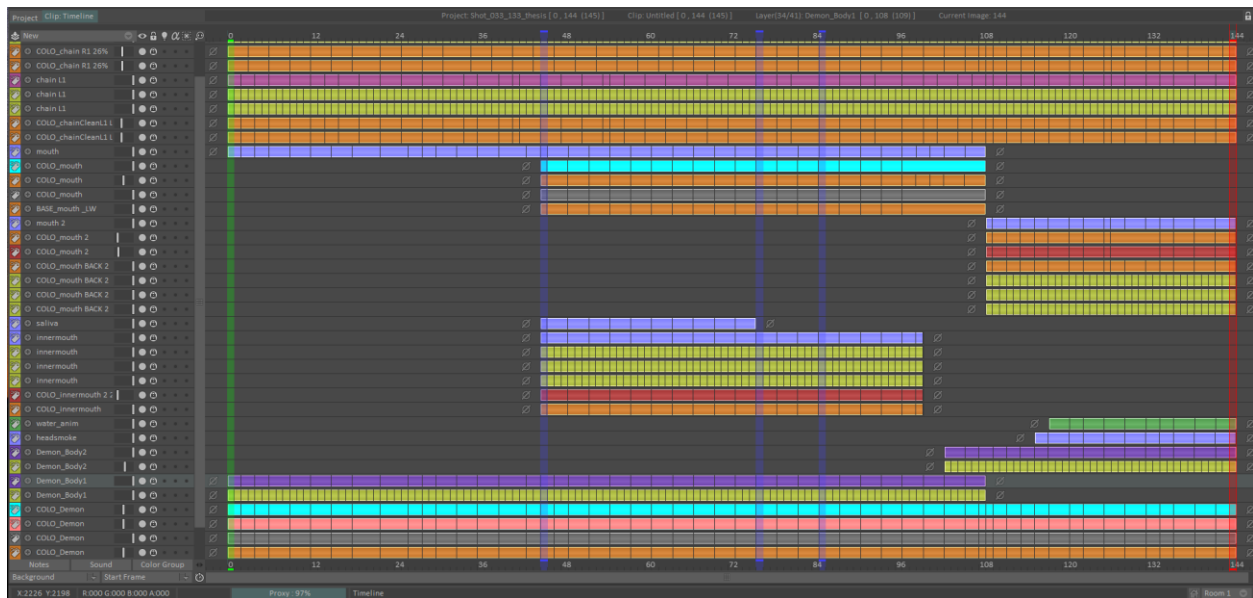
Figure 14: TVPaint layers for Shot 033.

Source James Chambless III

My animation derived from the strategy with my layer system, and the number of layers

applied to it. I duplicated layers in specific instances and applied effects to them directly to not

affect the primary layers. I did this with the glow effect of my demon antagonist by layering the

original linework on top of the duplicated glow layer. This allowed the character outline to add

contrast while lowering the opacity of the linework layer, thus providing a sense of translucency.

Figure 15: Shot 033 corresponds to the TVPaint layer system in Figure 14.

Source: James Chambless III

Labor

I hired the help of an animator with the completion of *The Curse Breaker*. Jesus Evangelista, a former UCF Character Animation undergraduate student, assisted with rough character animation for shots 06, 14, and 31. During my thesis film, this prov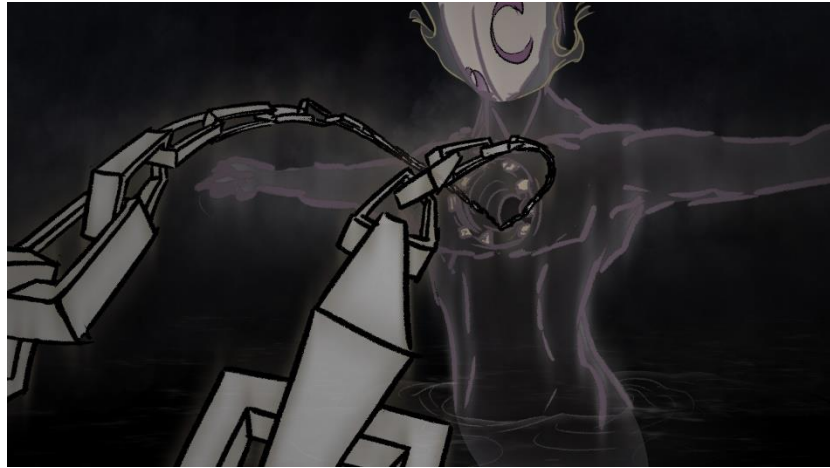ided a directorial experience allowing me to metaphorically let go of the wheel and let someone else drive for this portion. The shots I provided to the animator contained minimal rough animation and key poses. They needed additional polish with more rough animation and in-betweens, thus matching the style of my other animated shots. I took care of the cleanup animation and ultimately securing the consistency of my linework and aesthetic.

Additionally, I employed former UCF Emerging Media MFA graduate, Kirstin Hardin, to digitally paint backgrounds while matching my initial background style from my proof of concept shot. This element of my thesis film and animation pipeline production required attention. My laid out linework and finalized environments lacked color. Receiving the

completed backgrounds for my film showed that I had underrepresented the use of color in my thesis film. They exceeded my expectation in every way.

Composite Theory

Matte paintings and background elements are designed separately in digital software such as Procreate and Adobe Photoshop. The animation and matte paintings are assembled in Adobe After Effects. This allowed for a higher degree of control over the final aesthetic while animating or shifting the planar images separately. By animating planar layers individually from the character, an atmospheric contrast began distinguishing the environmental space between the image layers. The lateral shifting of the background provided a sense of a constant lurking motion, furthering the symbolic meaning of confinement and mysterious control.

Use of Color

By using TVPaint's color texture layers, I filled the color of a character's line work with the click of the mouse. Some shots needed finessing after adding color. The color texture layer worked most efficiently when there were no gaps in the linework. Before beginning the ink and paint process, I ensured all animation line work was seamless. When I added color to the animation, any errors with the animation's linework and volumes were made apparent and required minor adjustments.

Figure 16: Still images from proof of concept with grey and black outlines.

Source: James Chambless III

With 2D animation, the linework chosen is extremely important to how the animation and motion are interpreted. Initially selected for my film, the linework was a pen-like smooth line inked in a mid-tone grey. After compositing the proof-of-concept shots, I made two changes. First, the color of the linework was changed to black for stronger contrast. The original grey color of the linework proved challenging to see while attempting to interpret character motion. The use of black linework as a character outline helped differentiate the character from the background. This difference created a further illusion of depth to be felt. Secondly, the stroke of the animation was switched from the smooth linework to one imitating a pencil-drawn look by using TVPaint's default brush.

Growth and Demand for 2D Animation

Based on intuition and experience, I chose to animate my thesis film in 2D. I have always been influenced by 2D animation. As a child, it was my way to escape and bring my imagination to life. Watching televised cartoons, such as *Dinosaucers*, in the 1980s were some of my earliest

memories of experiencing animation. *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and Disney were additional vital influences on my childhood.

In the 1990s, Disney was indisputably successful with animated films, such as *The Lion King, Aladdin, Pocahontas, and Mulan*. Warner Brothers, Nickelodeon, and Cartoon Network broadcasted 2D animation in the form of cartoons to the youth of America. They aired *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Loony Tunes*, *Rugrats,* and *Dragon Ball Z.* There is a connection between the youth of the 1990s and 2D animation leading to the current resurgence of 2D animation into the entertainment industry in more than just the stereotypical children's cartoon aesthetic. This generation has grown to become animators who bring this influence into the present-day animation industry. 2D has the stereotype of being for children in America; this will hopefully change as more adult-oriented 2D animation is created for targeted audiences.

Netflix is an example of a streaming service that has mature animated stories. Both *Castlevania* and the *DC Animated Universe* contain gore and violence. Contrary to widespread knowledge, the DC universe live-action films are censored compared to their animated counterparts. Another show for mature audiences on Netflix is Riot's *Arcane*. The adult content in *Arcane* is delivered in narrative, character, and language. It is a primarily 3D animated show with 2D animated effects produced in a phenomenally composited fashion (Connellan). The integration of 2D and 3D animation mediums is already present in the industry. My thesis film prepares me for future projects that embrace both styles of animation.

CONCLUSION

This may be a conclusion, but it certainly does not end here. This is a theoretical baton of knowledge and experience being passed to the next version of me. I have understood narrative strategies and Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, the standard hero formula. By implementing symbolic representation into the story development process, I reinforced the aesthetic of *The Curse Breaker*. My research of Sigmund Freud aided in my understanding of the human conscious and inspired the design of my well. To reinforce the narrative, I turned to the rule of six set forth by Walter Murch, a cinematic rubric for editing.

Personifying my cigarette addiction through animation is only a glimpse of the actual value of animation in modern society. Technological advances have aided in the resurgence of 2D animation with digital software. TVPaint provided the digital platform allowing me to animate my struggle and bring it to light for audiences. This is a battle I am proud to say is no longer a part of my life. I succeeded in defeating my inner demon and am no longer bound by the chains of smoking addiction. As of December 28th, 2020, cigarettes became part of my past, and a new beginning has begun.

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