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Reflective Essay

Meet Pig Guy: An Animated Character Study in 3-D

by

Michael Lebson

Animation is a truly wonderful art. While other forms of art provide glimpses of our world, only animation is capable of portraying the most precious of gifts – Life. If we view ourselves as having been created with a sense of organic purpose and not just static existence, then our celebration of life should reflect that view. The animator has the tools necessary to create such a portrayal, and, with proper imagination, they can reach far beyond the limitations of words, pictures, and paint.

Lying beneath the beauty, however, resides an amazing array of elements coming together to produce a life-like result. Let us compare one action in two different forms. The sentence, "A deer ran across the street," takes about four seconds to write and two seconds to read. For the same action to be animated, much work must be done. What kind of deer is it – a realistic or a cartoonish one? Does it run fast or slow? Is it running scared or confidently? To get the animal's gait correctly, the animator may have to do research' to get the animation just right, he may have to adjust the drawings, or, possibly even start over. To not fix all the

technical errors could make our animation the written equivalent of the sentence, "the deer runned across the street." Without proper editing, the animation would crumble from a weak foundation. While the sentence took about four seconds to write, the animation could take two days to create. For our two second long artwork, the animation is far more interesting and memorable, but at the cost of much longer preparation.

My Capstone project, *Meet Pig Guy*, is an animated study of a super-hero character named Pig Guy. This animation shows Pig Guy engaged in one of his favorite activities -- eating. One of Pig Guy's traits is that he is a drama queen, and this seemingly normal situation is typical of his personality. His favorite food, Meeky's 100% Pig Lard, is running out and he wants more. There is a fresh container on his coffee table, but his getting to it is not so easy. He is too lazy to reach for it and, at first, gives up but finally changes his mind and grabs it. He becomes angry when he cannot open the container and frustrated when he detects a stench on his eating finger. By the end of this scene, he recieves a call for his super-hero services and must put his lard-eating on hold.

A large aspect of my Capstone was about building the character himself, since I wanted to have a re-usable character that was interesting and funny enough to be used multiple times, and to have enough strength to prevent out-warming his welcome. As a result, I wanted to create a slight glimpse into Pig Guy's daily actions, as opposed to having a full fledged animated short, because I did not want a story arc. I felt that if

there was a resolution in my character's existence in his very first short,

what room is there to grow?

My Capstone tale began during an all-nighter at the Bird Library

back in the Fall 2008 semester.   I had an assignment to do for my CAR

430 class, a senior seminar class that was open-ended in nature, and I

needed to have something for class, but was not sure what to make. I

thought as a computer art major, the holy grail for projects is to eventually

make an animated short. With that in mind, I figured a good place to start

would be to make a memorable character.

Pig Guy, started from a character idea I had come up with weeks

prior. I was interested in making an animation on someone who was self-

defeatist and had questionable self-esteem, yet was easy to root for. With

these traits in mind, I concluded that a super-hero would be a good

archetype to use for this premise. It took only one sketch of Pig Guy to

get what I wanted: He was a "super-hero," but he was really just a short

fat guy with an excuse to be in a pig suit. He had a dopey expression, and

looked as if he was trying to stand up tall, yet still seemed weak. He was

a super-hero, yet felt like a loser. His super-hero suit, normally a symbol

of strength, was a sign of weakness. He pictured himself as a man, but he

looked like a cartoon. I felt that the conflict of the normal super-hero

archetype on a weak character was captured on my Pig Guy model. After

discussing this character to my CAR 430 class, they seemed to give it the

proverbial "go," and from then on I was convinced this guy could be an

effective character to drive an animation.

      To be honest, as much as I admire animation as an art form, I am not very well versed in animated films or television shows. I have a far greater affinity towards video-games, which use 3-D animation as well, but it serves a functional purpose. The video-games of today generally try to mimic life as closely as possible, so use motion capture techniques to achieve these ends. Thematically, these games generally have more mature subject matter, whether it being a sports game like *Madden 2010* or a shooting game like *Halo 3.* As a result, my taste in animated art has always been closer to the video-game spectrum instead of classical animation, which generally appeals to younger audiences. Even as a child, my favorite animated film was *Transformers: The Movie* (1986), which is not classical animation, rather an Americanized form of Japanese animation. Japanese style animation generally has visuals that are more mature and realistic. As a result, for my character's eventual animation, I wanted to marry this realistic animation mentality with the visual style of classical cartoon animation.

      As a base point, I found similarities of Pig Guy with non-conventional animation shows, from cartoons like *The Tick* or from shows found on *Adult Swim.* My character, with his deficiencies from the archetypical super-hero, seems primed to an alternative story structure, like these. In these shows, the actual superpowers these heroes possess are often of minor concern to the story. I think the premise of an "off-duty"

super-hero is an efficient way to give a character some depth and/or back-story to an animation, without having to get into the superpowers themselves. Being a super-hero also enables you to have all the super-hero accouterments, like a cool costume, setting, and gadgets, which creates dynamic and iconic visuals for the story. Also, the contrast of being a super-hero that still has faults help make a well rounded character in a fast and efficient way. When there is a story trying to be told in a matter of seconds, the quicker you can accomplish things, the better. With the theorizing in place, I began the 3-D animation journey.

I have put extra emphasis on the process I went through to create *Meet Pig Guy* because of how much work it is in every stage of animating. In the professional 3-D world, you generally become specialized in a single area of the 3-D pipeline because they are all incredibly difficult fields to master on their own. The art of creating a 3-D animation by one person is a difficult thing to accomplish, since it takes all aspects of your talents in order to create it. You truly become a human swiss army knife during the process, since the steps of the 3-D animation pipeline are brought together and done by a single person.

I must say that my animation pipeline was anything but typical, and far from optimal in hindsight. This was my first time animating with hopes of making a demo reel quality work, so I made a lot of mistakes. I often got caught up in certain phases for too long, made a lot of models for my Capstone that will not be seen because of cutting down the animation, and

I in general felt that I had "all the time in the world" to get the exact

specifications I desired at every step of the pipeline. Needless to say, we

know how that mentality works. But, it was a learning experience, and I

would not change it for anything. With that said, my personal animation

pipeline began soon after presenting Pig Guy to my CAR 430 class.

The first step I took to creating a Pig Guy animation was creating

the assets, or models, for the animation. The term "modeling" means the

building of the three-dimensional forms found in a animation. If you can

see a wine-glass, a table, or a couch, it had to be built using a modeling

program. Models are created using a system of points connected by

vertices on a 3-D grid, that when combined together in a certain way, can

form almost any object. 3-D modeling, while done on a computer, is much

more akin to drawing and sculpting than one may think. There are

numerous ways to approach modeling, since the tools provided by a 3-D

program, like Lightwave's Modeler, allow you to place individual points and

polygons wherever you want, which is much like drawing. And, you can

manipulate these points by adding more polygons, push parts of a form in,

pull things out, cut things up, or put things together, like sculpting. This is

a very simplified and non-exhaustive explanation, but I believe it shows

the translation between modeling and more traditional art forms. The

modeling phase of this project was a great experience and has left me

pretty confident in my overall modeling ability.

The first thing I began modeling was the character, and has truly

been an evolving process since the beginning. All it really took for me to get the rough look of my character was one night and two different modeling tutorials found online. I really captured the sketches' personality after that night, and after that it was just a matter of improving the polygonal structure of the model and other efficiency related things, making it slowly evolve over time. In fact, I still was making adjustments to the character's polygonal structure deep into the animating process.

Over the course of time, I started to see Pig Guy as cynical and grumpy instead of dopey, so modeled him accordingly. He began to look more like a guy with a napoleonic complex instead of a guy that was too down on himself to have one. This change was made when I realized that the scope of this animation was smaller than I originally planned, and felt that a story of him growing from a loser to the ideal super-hero would take too much time to develop, and probably end up less entertaining since that story arc is basically what happens in every Hollywood film today. I felt that a grumpy character with anger issues would make more of an impact in a two minute time period than a guy too scared to do anything. Since I was going for a realistic style, I wanted my character and his world to feel real and mundane so I did not want some forced, artificial growth to occur. Pig Guy was not a cartoon in my eyes, he was a real guy that just so happened to be a cartoon.

Because I accepted this early on, I modeled my assets, whether it were chairs, walls, cabinets, lights, televisions, what have you, all with a

very basic and non cartoonish style. I felt that the contrast of a cartoony character, with a "real" personality and a "real" setting would be something worth exploring, so modeled everything as such. Sure, the objects are simplified and are not modeled as technically as they may be by architects, but I still modeled them with the thought in mind they were real, not cartoon objects. The end result is a set which looks like it could be a basement in a t.v. sitcom, with some paintings, a sculpture, big screen t.v., and a fully stocked bar. I consciously did not add any other goodies you might normally find in a house of someone of considerable wealth, since I figured that Pig Guy, as a single bachelor, probably would only worry about the essentials: electronics, art, and alcohol.

While I made only a few set pieces overall, I really wanted to flesh them out so they had the flexibility of being fully interacted with, if the opportunity came up. For example, in the bar area of the setting, I made it so all the wine bottles, liquor bottles, and glasses could be picked up and used if necessary. I envisioned him throwing a tantrum over in the bar area, and wanted my scene to be as flexible as possible to support that. Of course, this was never implemented into "Meet Pig Guy."

Likewise, my attention to the modeling was extensive in the other aspects of the room too, like the television set up, or the mini art-gallery on the other end of the room, built with the same flexibility in mind as with the bar. I put a great deal of time into the look of the ceiling and walls, because I really wanted to capture the look and feel of an upper class

setting. I even made a bust sculpture of Pig Guy to place in the art gallery side of the room. Talk about decadence, both within the animation itself and in my use of time.

In general, "texturing" is a large part of 3-D animation, increasing in recent times. Modeling builds the form of the objects for an animation, and texturing creates the surfaces found on these structures. Texturing, if used efficiently, can make things look far more realistic than any high polygon count model can, since everything other than probably plastic or glass has texture. For my project, one thing I consciously avoided was worrying about full-fledged texturing.

Pig Guy's current surfacing was originally meant to be a placeholder, but began to grow me. I thought his flat shaded suit and skin had a powerful effect. The defining factor that satisfied me to go on without complex texturing was his five o'clock shadow. I figured if it looked "right," going with the flat shaded look for everything else would work fine as well. I knew Homer Simpson has the same effect with his beard, so I thought it could work here too.   I thought that if the five o'clock shadow beard did not clash with my psuedo-realistic setting, then the flat shading would work as a whole. Obviously, implementing quality textures would vastly improve the look of my animation, but only if used correctly, so I figured it was an area I should put to the side for my Capstone. This led me to most problematic stage of my Capstone, rigging.

The modeling and animating are the creative and exhilarating

stages, while the rigging phase is the bridge between the two. It is the stage that makes all the models you made have a purpose, and gives the character the opportunity to reach its maximum potential. And, unlike texturing or lighting, rigging is not a phase that can be neglected, rigging a character properly is a requirement that can make or break an animation on its own.

If we could rewind to the beginning of October 2009, and you told me I would have been still trying to rig and weight-map my character at the end of March 2010, I would have told you, you were nuts, but secretly, I would not be very surprised! The rigging process of the animation pipeline is extremely important, and its also the stage that has the least in common with the others. The rigging phase, which varies depending on the software used, is where controls are implemented in objects in order for them to move predictably and reliably.

For *Meet Pig Guy*, I used Lightwave v9.6 Layout as my animation program, and the rigging phase in Layout starts with placing "bones" inside the character to get him to move. The bones are placed in areas so they mimic the visual equivalent of a humanoid skeleton. For example, you may have a single bone act as the femur bone, then use a single bone for the lower leg, instead of two. The second major part to the rigging process was "weight-mapping," which act as the muscles for bones. Weight-maps are actually just areas of influence, so you apply weight-maps to certain bones that you want to move certain ways. Now, it

sounds intuitive and logical enough, but, just like our own bodies, a couple of bones with muscles slapped on does not make a body move, does it? It is a little more complex than that. While I did have minor trouble with Pig Guy's bones working correctly, the true source of my problems lied in the weight-mapping process of my character.

Pig Guy is a short guy with thick limbs and an overweight body, all in a skin tight suit. I honestly do not believe I've ever seen a character with specifications like these in a short, and I can now see why. Animated shorts generally use visual conventions, and one I am used to seeing is skinny limbs on characters, regardless of body type. Overweight characters will have skinny arms and legs compared to their torso and head, which receive the overweight conventions. This does often create a more comedic looking character, but I believe this is for functional purposes as well. A smaller arm will have a smaller connection to a torso, it will be noticed less, and imperfections at this bending area will be smaller. Also, general character conventions usually make overweight characters move slowly and have smaller ranges of motion. As I have stated before, I was trying to avoid classical animation conventions. I wanted an overweight character, but he was also a super-hero, so he was going to be nimble on his feet, if necessary. I wanted him to have the athleticism of a Chris Farley, who actually was a very flexible and strong man which enabled him to perform his physical comedy as well as he did. He was overweight, but he did not move like someone who was. I did not

want to compromise my character and make him have skinny arms or legs, because I wanted him to look like he was formerly muscular and athletic, but had just let himself go. He is a super-hero, after all.

Now, lets just admit that this was a mistake to a degree. Based on my knowledge of rigging at the time, I should have made adjustments to my character in order for the rigging process to move faster. But, I didn't, and I actually learned quite a lot by sticking to my guns (his guns in this case). The real problem, was (and still is) that a 3-D mesh does not have the same muscular capabilities that a human body does. A human body moves the way it does because of the bones and the muscles surrounding them. A 3-D mesh is just a shell, so there is a lot to be done for a 3-D character to move like a human body. My plan to get Pig Guy to move realistically was to just weight-map him as well as I could.

Needless to say this approach did not work. At the time, I did not understand weight-maps well enough to know how to go about making a proper map. Up until Winter break last year, I was in the mindset I had to apply a weight-map for every single bone, which is actually a complete no-no when it comes to weight-mapping (some video game engines are exceptions). Not only was this incredibly time consuming, but incredibly frustrating. My character has about 70 bones, so when I was going this route, I would have to make the same number of weight-maps individually (70) and apply them accordingly. If I would change any of them, I would have to adjust the weight-maps surrounding the adjusted one, since each

bone had it's own weight-map. Because weight-maps are applied on a scale from 0-100%, points on a mesh could have up to 4-5 weight-maps on them, if necessary. For example, polygons in the clavicle area of Pig Guy could have a weight-map from the neck bones, from the shoulder bone, from the arm bones, and from the spine bones, using the individual weight-map per bone method. If the total influence was greater (or less) than 100%, it could cause issues. Even if everything equaled 100%, it most likely did not deform the way you wanted it to, because properly adjusting the influence of six or seven bones on one point of the mesh, without ruining the other points around it was pretty much impossible. It was not until I bought a book about rigging that this step took a turn for the better.

The book I received as a gift is called *Cartoon Character Creation Volume 2: Rigging and Animation,* by Lightwave expert named Jonny Gorden. When I received this book as a Christmas present, it was apparent that I would have to start my character's rig completely over. I followed the instructions to create a new skeleton and did the weight-maps the way the author, Jonny Gorden, said to make them. His teaching showed me that you only need weight-maps for general areas of a mesh. For example, instead of having 16 weight-maps for a hand (one for the palm, three for each finger and thumb), only one is used. Instead of having six weight-maps for the six spine bones, I had just one, and so on. While this was certainly got me further than where I was prior to receiving

the book, the model used in his examples (ironically, a bipedal pig

character) had a completely different topology and body type than mine.

So, trouble areas of my character, the hips and the shoulders, remained

the same because the weight-maps were still not properly designed for my

character.

It was not until I read in the "Advanced Rigging" section about a

plugin named JointMorphPlus, that actually enabled me to move on with

the rig. This plugin enables you to move the mesh how you choose,

depending on the angle and direction a bone is moving. For example, a

problem area I had on my character was bringing up the knee to waist

height. On my character, his gut hangs far over his underwear, so when I

would lift his legs up, his legs would go through the gut, and it would be

noticeable and distracting. Finding this plugin enabled me to fix many of

the issues I had, although it was only a cosmetic fix. I still would say I do

not have a great handle on weight-maps, but I will use this information to

put myself in a better position to succeed in the future. Regardless, the

use of JointMorphPlus took me to a point where I was satisfied to finally

move on from the rig in late March.

Here is where the fun began. It is strange, because I would say I

am better at modeling and would probably prefer it as my profession over

animating if I had to choose, but there is no more satisfying part to 3-D

than animating. There is something magical about taking all this

inanimate stuff you have created, then bringing it together to create a

world where things come alive. I'm not sure what it is, but when creative

work involves creating life, it raises your awareness of life itself and what

makes you feel more alive.

All the work I had done in the previous stages could now be put to

use. Because I was pressed for time at this point, with only a month to

really animate, many assets I created for this animation had to be pushed

to the side for future Pig Guy endeavors, and some scenes I even began

animating, but I felt I had to discontinue these for the sake of time as well.

Sometimes, however, this works in our favor, as this actually caused me to

do real story editing, something I sort of neglected right from the start. I

had been (and still am) so enthralled with my character I thought my story

would be truly secondary, so had never really thought it through from start

to finish. I had even made story boards and time tests along the way, but I

still never thought what I had was the definite story. I was now at the point

where I had to make story decisions, there was no time left.

Like I said in my introduction, my animation is a character study for

Pig Guy. I emphasize character study instead of it being an animated

short, because my animation does not have a real beginning, middle, and

end. Looking in the long term, and with what I just went through with

rigging, I felt as though my first true experience with animating would be

riddled with problems, so I wanted to stick to something simple that I could

perhaps exceed expectations on. I did not want to make a definitive story

with Pig Guy as his first animation, because I did not want to "taint" the

character per se. If Pig Guy was someone I wanted to continue using, I did not want to him to be ruined by failed uses of his name. The second Star Wars trilogy comes to mind when I say this. Although the old trilogy was not changed by Lucas' new films, there is a mystique that is now lost because his failures with the new trilogy. I know situation is far more insignificant, but with the amount of time I put into Pig Guy himself, I did not want his first animation to ruin him.

And with that, I had the end in sight. When I finally finished my first pass of animation and posted it on online, that's when I felt the magic I have been speaking of. A first pass of animation generally consists of keyframes that create the foundation for the animation. Even there, I still felt like I was not animating, because it was just creating the setup, there is nothing truly alive about it. So, when this was done, everything was then a matter of my creative instinct. I had been working so long on my character, that he basically became an extension of myself. Many of his personality traits, seemed to reflect my own and as a result the animation phase had been nothing but exciting.

My true influences on this project are actually limited, which I now find to be both a benefit and a detriment. It is a good thing in the sense that I'm pretty sure this character has not been a subconscious theft of something else that's already out there, but it's bad in the sense that if it were, I would have no idea because I am uninformed. I said before that I used programs from *Adult Swim* or shows like *The Tick* as a source of

inspiration, but it is in a very topical sense, I don't think I have seen *The Tick* in 10-15 years, and I have only seen a handful of clips from *Adult Swim.* From what I do know about them, I like the *feeling* they give me, and I feel like their comedic sensibility is probably close to my own.

There are not any particular animators I was trying to emulate either. Rather, I wanted to avoid the classical style and the natural beauty this style exudes. Flowing curves, squash and stretch, anticipation, follow through, all these things, for example, are things that Disney animation has instilled in animation since their beginnings. As I explained earlier, I really viewed Pig Guy as a person instead of a cartoon character, so I felt that having this classical animation style would make him seem too bouncy, too soft, and too artificial to be perceived as real.

I still tried using some of these techniques because of the complexity of human movement. It is hard not to use the classical techniques perfected by Disney because they became "conventions" for a reason; they create a naturalism in the context of the animated world. Trying to mimic human movement is almost impossible because we as humans can easily sense what looks real or fake since we interact with humans all the time.

In the earlier stages of this project, I had more grandiose visions for the message my animation would provide. The earlier conceptions for my character had him less confident and more timid, and I was hoping for a more traditional moral message at the end of the animation about

personal growth and facing your fears. The original story idea was for Pig Guy to be a sidekick to a "real" super-hero, but during a routine rendezvous with a super-villain the super-hero dies along the way, leaving Pig Guy to do all the work himself. Because he was a side-kick, in addition to his fears and inexperience as a leading man, his super-power, the ability to eat anything, always felt sort of worthless and inadequate. But, in a battle against the super-villain he learns the potential of his power when put into the right position. We can see how much simpler things became with my story.

A story like this however would not have brought anything new to the table, so I am happy I never went this far. It could be entertaining, sure, but I think since there was a lack of true originality in the story. I feel that the less creativity there is in your concept then the better the execution needs to be, and in my early days of working in animation, I'd rather take a risk and do something closer my heart and fail instead of something traditional, even contrived, and possibly still fail anyway.

What I really want people to take from this animation is an experience which may feel new or different to them. I really want my character to stick out from the crowd, and I think I did as many things as I could to make this happen. All my modeling decisions, character decisions, and animating decisions, were made keeping in mind of what I wanted my character to be.

Although my animation does not have a typical story structure with a problem and resolution, my animation still presents to us some of Pig Guy's problems. I said before that Pig Guy in many ways is an extension of myself, and I really mean it. I think his problems are very real, whether they are presented realistically or not, because a lot of them are reflections of myself. His constant eating of lard is an example. It is something he should not do, but he does so anyway. Some of his decisions he makes are similar to mine. I would say I possess qualities of being a procrastinator, and Pig Guy does as well. His decision to lay down after he finishes the first container of lard is an example of a decision I often make. Many times I might have an assignment I need to work on, and even though I know I want to, need to, etc, I will do something else instead. The assignment will stay on my mind, relentlessly telling myself what needs to be done, but I will just continue on neglecting it until my procrastination time was satisfied. Pig Guy does this when instead of getting the new container immediately, he decides to lie down instead, only to realize he will not get his desired lard until he sits back up again, and eventually does so. Obviously, you will not read into his action that deeply while watching, but I feel confident that his behavior seems realistic because I know I have done the same thing before, and I know why I did it.

If we look at his continuous smelling of his finger, this is something I have seen done by numerous people, and thought it fit Pig Guy's character. How many times have you had someone tell you how bad something smells, then ask you to smell it? I know it happens to me all the time, and I figured this fit Pig Guy's character perfectly. This is one of

these little tidbits that I probably would not have been able to put in an animated short if it had a conventional story structure, since it would have diverted and distracted the viewer. With my first animation being a simple character study, I could develop his character to my liking.

I opened my reflection with my thoughts of how great animating is, and I think these previous examples explain just why I love it so much. How many times can you have a fat guy in a pig suit sniff his finger a bunch of times because it smells so bad? Seriously, in no other art form would this be viable.

This project was a product of work occurring off and on over the course of four semesters. It started off as a simple 3-D character model during the Fall 2008 semester for my CAR 430 Senior Seminar class. Everything I did then was new to me, but I learned a ton in that semester about modeling. Some techniques I learned then I will always remember and use for the rest of my life. It was a rather slow process, but I truly felt happy with what I had created, something that does not happen for me too often! I still look at the Pig Guy model and seem satisfied and impressed with how it turned out. And to think I basically made it in one night seems fascinating to me, because I feel as though that would be impossible. I look forward to future endeavors with modeling, because I definitely believe it is a strong suit of mine. I have been busy with Pig Guy for awhile now, so it is understandable I have not had the chance to make new characters yet.

Once Winter Break 08-09 started, I took a break from this project to focus on a contest hosted by CGSociety.org, called *Surreal,* which was a

contest to create either a 2-D or 3-D work that mimicked the art of surreal artist Jacek Yerka. That project, along with other 2-D works which spawned from it, were completed as well for my Spring 2009 CAR 432 class. By the end of the semester, I began to model the additional assets for the animation, lasting until the end of Summer. This led to the start of rigging in October 2009, and as I said before, did not become truly resolved until the end of March 2010. Animating occurred from the end of March until now, the beginning of May 2010. Overall, it was an incredible process, and I feel like I learned a lot about myself and the way I go about doing work.

There are numerous things about my work habits I need to change, but have started that process already. I think I finally learned once and for all, that, it is possible to spend too much time in a certain area of a project, even if you want it to be perfect, because sometimes it can bog you down and cause you to lose focus and sight of the original goal. I was certainly a victim of this in the rigging phase. There were days I just would try random things and just blindly hope something good would come out of it, because I was so lost. And this only made it worse. But, if you seek out help and take an active approach of looking at things differently, you can oftentimes see the light and make it through.

In the future, I plan to work more on *Meet Pig Guy*, because in it's current state, I still have the potential to improve things. As my all of my skills in 3-D animation improve, I will be able to accomplish more and more with the *Meet Pig Guy* character study, and eventually use it as a springboard for future Pig Guy productions. I find in many ways, that Pig Guy and I are one in the same, and I think our relationship is only

beginning.

Summary

Meet Pig Guy: An Animated Character Study in 3D

by

Michael Lebson

The 3D animation, "Meet Pig Guy," is an introduction to Pig Guy, whom I have designed over the past year and a half. Pig Guy is a world renowned super-hero that is enormously successful in his professional endeavors, but has flaws, shortcomings, and imperfections that make him very human. In this one minute and 20 second long animated short, we get a glimpse into his behaviors through a candid situation of himself in his basement. "Meet Pig Guy" presents us with a problem of his, the abuse of his superpower to eat anything he wants. We see Pig Guy struggle to grab, eat, and open containers of his favorite food, lard, all the while a funny smell is emanating from his finger that he can not quite avoid smelling.

While the whole process began in the Fall 2008 semester, the animation itself took about a month to do. It started as the blocking out the basic poses in still frames, then slowly more and more animation was added until the point where I could add interpolation, the connecting frames in between the key frames that give the illusion of movement. That

point brought me to my "first pass," in animation terms. A first pass is generally the blocking out of the major movements. Blocking out, in turn, means to roughly lay out all of the movements from start to finish in order to create a foundation. Once the major movements were blocked out, I started on the second pass. I cleaned up all my interpolating frames to make the motion much smoother and cleaner than before. I also added some basic color changing techniques, found in Pig Guy's skin color and cell phone as ways of enhancing the story. The third and final pass I went through for this animation was to adjust the timing of the animation, do additional clean-up, and add the basic facial animation.

My audio choices were simple, but I feel that they got to the point with my character and match the feel of the animation as a whole. My soundtrack choice for the animation was the song "She Drives Me Crazy" by the Fine Young Cannibals, which I believe matches the absurdity of a small fat guy in a pig suit trying to open a plastic container in his living room. There is one piece of non-musical audio, which was the line " This is Pig Guy, what do you want?" I felt compelled to add some dialogue because of my emphasis on the mundane.   I felt that a cell-phone call was a pretty mundane occurrence and seemed like a good way to hear Pig Guy's voice, furthering his personality.

Other artistic decisions include my use of television lighting and the lack of multiple camera shots, placing the camera where the television would presumably be located. I felt that the television light flicker effect

added a little extra drama to the scene, and once I got it to a fairly realistic

level I was highly satisfied with the result. A pet peeve of mine in today's

entertainment world is the over-use of camera shots and cuts. I wanted to

avoid using as many cuts as possible in order to allow the animation to do

the talking, and leave nothing to hide. Story-wise, I felt that the lack of

camera shots fit my animation as well because of the mundane nature

anyway, so I believe it was the right choice.

My work over the last year and a half has put a great emphasis on

building the character, Pig Guy, to a point where he has the viability to be

used over and over again as a lead character in animations. Because I

had these long term goals in mind, I found that it was best to create a

short that did not have the typical basic story structure of beginning,

middle and end, as well as an obvious character arc. I wanted my

character to keep his problems during the animation, to show that the

depth of the character went beyond a superficial surface. The style of the

animation itself has a reserved use of classical animation conventions,

since I wanted to give the character a greater sense of humanity. I was

not looking to reach motion-capture level movement by any means, but I

did want to move closer to that end of the spectrum, away from classical

traditions. My intentions and my final result were not entirely matched, but

understandably so since I am relatively new to the actual art of animating.

This animation was done almost entirely through the computer

program Lightwave 3-D, which consists of two separate programs,

Modeler and Layout. All asset building was done in Modeler, while all of the animation work is done in Layout. The general pipeline I followed for my animation was six months modeling and texturing these assets, about five months of rigging the Pig Guy character, and a month and a half of animating. Basic post-production work for my animation was done with use of programs Photoshop, After Effects, and Logic Pro.

I believe that I learned a great deal going through the *Meet Pig Guy* animation process, because it was the first time I created an animation with the intent of it being demo-reel quality. It certainly caused me to work hard, but it was almost to a fault, since I spent so much time creating models for the setting that I probably could have skipped since they never made it into my animation anyway.   This pushed my work on the character rig, the controls that make Pig Guy move, back as well. The rigging stage for my character was extremely problematic and probably went four months longer than I was expecting it to. Knowing what I know now, I would have not been quite as stubborn keeping my model as difficult to rig as it was. This would have allowed for more animation time, and less story trimming in the early animation stages, two things that would have greatly benefitted the animation itself.

Despite my lessons learned, I still think this character study accomplishes what my original goals were. I wanted to sculpt the behaviors of my character using mundane events to show what he is really like a normal person, despite the exterior, and I think I achieved that.

The creation of this animation was important, because my intent to use Pig Guy as a long term character made it necessary to have an origin, or a soul, to his future endeavors. He shows no character growth in this animation, and that is the way I wanted it.

In the end, I am proud and excited with creating *Meet Pig Guy* because I still have great intentions for this character. This work was a necessary step to take in my future career of computer art, as I had my first extensive opportunity to tackle the rigging and animating phases of the animation process. Of course, like any creative work, there are things I could have done different with the final product and with the process I took to get to the final product, but I also learned so much that I would not give up this new found wisdom for anything. My career will be forever benefited by "Meet Pig Guy", both in endeavors with the Pig Guy character himself as well as all other creative work, whether animation based or not.

The one thing I believe that got reinforced going through the animation process is, there is nothing more gratifying than doing animation for models and characters that you built yourself. There is something great about bringing something to life that you already felt was your own, and breathing life into it adds a whole new dimension to your appreciation of the work you are doing. In the end, this animation was important in so many ways. It was first a successful study of my character, Pig Guy, enhancing and defining his characteristics, but it also was significant in that it gave me yet another glimpse into animating and another reason

why I feel the process is so gratifying and awesome to be a part of.