

The proposal script

SLIDE 1

Hello everyone, my name is Andruw Cervantes, and this is my thesis proposal for What Lies Beyond, a comedic 4-minute 2D animated short film about an alien who invents an omnipotent element with disastrous results.

SLIDE 2

First off, for those who are wondering, who am I? Well, like I just said, I'm Andruw Cervantes. I was born, raised, and will hopefully die of old age here in Oregon and transferred to PNCA from Mt. Hood Community College in August 2024 to pursue a BFA in the Animated Arts. I have an undying passion for the medium of animation and that passion is what led me to attend a place like PNCA! It's absolutely insane to me how I've been here for only seven months and I'm already proposing my thesis! Surrounding this caricature of myself are various works I've done here at PNCA, including a turnaround sheet for the 2025 Animation Jam film Good Knight Princess.

SLIDE 3

Speaking of works I've done here, concurrently with the pre-production of What Lies Beyond, I've been working on another film for my Animated Short Film class: Untitled Yuri Cartoon, which is two minutes and 20 seconds long. I had a hard time giving this film a title so I went with a reference to the video game Untitled Goose Game. I was indecisive on what idea I wanted to animate so I had some friends vote for their favorite and fruity women is what the majority wanted. But hey, I do think we need more queer media in this day and age so I consider this a win! Anyway, this is about two university students, Xochitl and Adeline, doing cute things together. I am doing a separate film with a simple storyline because I wanted to go through the animation pipeline before fully diving into What Lies Beyond, which is more ambitious in story and scope. I've learned a lot and I now feel more confident in bringing What Lies Beyond to life as I inch closer to the completion of Untitled Yuri Cartoon, which has been possible to a limited color palette, limited animation, no dialogue, and because I already knew what I wanted to do for What Lies Beyond prior to the beginning of the Spring semester. Going off my shot list, I am done with backgrounds, rough animation with all but one shot, and have done cleanup animation and coloring for about half of the shots, making this project 65% complete.

SLIDE 4

Now, let's get to What Lies Beyond itself, starting with the line of inquiry: What are the effects of omnipotence on individuals? The definition of omnipotence is "the quality of having unlimited power" This line of inquiry will be explored through a slapstick comedy

storyline to make a complex topic easier to understand for general audiences, especially since animation - for better or for worse - is generally regarded as a medium for children. Also because I just love animation for its versatile nature, hence why I'm telling this story through animation.

SLIDE 5

The story will follow a simple structure with our protagonist, alien scientist Nova, creating a new element with omnipotent properties by combining every known element to her species as a means of faster-than-light travel. She believes that an element that can do anything will lead to her achieving this goal. In a very shocking turn of events, things go awry and now she has to fix this before the universe is destroyed by this all-powerful monster.

SLIDE 6

The idea of What Lies Beyond didn't just come out of thin air. Several things played a major influence in the creation of this project, with Super Mario Bros. Wonder being the biggest influence. This is a video game developed and published by Nintendo in 2023 for the Nintendo Switch system. In this side-scrolling entry in the long-running Super Mario series, the Wonder Flower is introduced. Collecting this power-up triggers a Wonder Effect, which completely changes the surrounding area of the level. The effects are different each time, ranging from making inanimate objects sentient, turning the player character into a different creature, and more. I linked this power-up to omnipotence, and was the basis for the creation of Volatium. Those who personally know me should not be surprised that I would look to the Super Mario games for inspiration!

SLIDE 7

As far as the animation and overall vibe I'm going for with this cartoon, I am inspired by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's Tom and Jerry as well as Warner Bros.' Looney Tunes. The fast-paced nature, slapstick comedy, simplistic art style, and character animation from both of these franchises were key reasons as to why What Lies Beyond looks and feels the way it is. I will be particularly looking at the 1940's-1960's cartoons for both of these franchises, as well as the very recently released Looney Tunes movie, The Day the Earth Blew Up, for reference. Please go watch The Day the Earth Blew Up by whatever means necessary, it's really really good!

SLIDE 8

The faster-than-light travel component of What Lies Beyond was influenced by Lucasfilm's Star Wars film series, specifically its hyperspace plot device. Although Star Wars was not the first piece of media to feature this plot device, it was the first piece of

media I saw which involved the use of it. Hyperspace is a pocket dimension where faster-than-light travel is achieved, and as far as I know, the invention of such an element hasn't really been explored in sci-fi media. This led me to wonder how such a potential storyline could be explored.

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In terms of background design, stylistically speaking, they will be similar to what you see here. Animated works like Looney Tunes, Samurai Jack, The Powerpuff Girls, and more feature simple looking backgrounds, and I always liked those styles.

SLIDE 10

After looking for inspiration, this is the end result of me looking at backgrounds like those.

SLIDE 11

That being said, let's move on to the characters, starting with our protagonist, Nova. She is an energetic scientist who is a little too passionate about her job. After being threatened to get fired by her boss after many failed attempts to realize her vision, she decides to invent a new element that can possibly lead to her goal, only for things to go awry.

SLIDE 12

Working alongside her is Orion, her assistant. While he shares Nova's desire to discover faster-than-light travel, he also recognizes that this is a very risky endeavor and prefers to not hurt himself while doing this. Unfortunately for him, he ends up getting hurt anyway.

SLIDE 13

Later on in the short, we will meet Nova's longtime friend Venus, an intern for the place Nova works at. This shy alien ends up being a part of this mess after Nova tells her how her day has been, and now she'll have to help make things right.

SLIDE 14

These are two characters who will have little screen time compared to the aforementioned characters as well as the antagonist I'll talk about shortly. To the left is Stumplump, a rotund alien slug thing who's the boss of Nova and Orion. He threatens to

fire the two due to how often they fail to achieve their goals. To the right is a human girl who is definitely not Xochitl from the aforementioned Untitled Yuri Cartoon. This astronomy student appears in a small scene where the omnipotent element demonstrates its faster-than-light travel capabilities.

SLIDE 15

The element Nova creates is called Volatium, a volatile element that ends up being a harbinger of chaos. It initially starts off as the form on the left, and is relatively normal in showing its all-powerful capabilities. Since stories traditionally have conflict in them, the Volatium predictably turns into the monster on the right and starts to wreak havoc.

SLIDE 16

I have an animatic fully timed with sound too. The runtime clocks in at minutes and seconds. I'll play a little snippet from the animatic! I just want to preface that the final product will not feature me voicing all the characters, this is all scratch audio!

SLIDE 17

I also prepared a trio of animation tests. This first one is a lip sync test. Prior to doing this, I had no experience with lip sync, so this was the perfect opportunity to practice!

SLIDE 18

This animation test features Venus making a few expressions. I just wanted to practice making a character emote while in motion.

SLIDE 19

This last animation test features how the Volatium will look like in motion. I combined the unique coloring style of C.H. Greenblat's Chowder with the shaky line art of Danny Antonucci's Ed, Edd, n' Eddy to animate the Volatium monster the way it is moving before all of you.

SLIDE 20

What Lies Beyond will be using four pieces of software to realize the project. Two pieces of animation software, Toon Boom Harmony on PC and Toon Squid on iPad, will be used. The former will be the primary method, while the latter will be used for more specific situations where the use of Toon Boom is impossible, such as if I'm out of town for example. The iPad illustration software Procreate will be used for backgrounds. The PC editing software Adobe Premiere Pro and will be used for editing the whole film together.

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The timeline of this project is simple enough. Throughout May, I will be working on the backgrounds as well as rough animation. From June to September, I will be focusing on rough animation completely. From October to February of the following year, I will be doing cleanup animation. From March up to my defense day, I will be editing the film together. A few friends of mine have expressed interest in helping me with the animation of the project, which will make this project more easily realizable.

SLIDE 22

In terms of budget, I either already got some friends lined up or will look for friends in this school to voice act. This will cost me up to \$120. I'll also be buying snacks to keep myself from being hungry, which'll cost me \$20, bringing my total to \$140.

SLIDE 23

To summarize, I will be creating a roughly four minute animated short film that will explore themes of omnipotence in a comedic manner. I sincerely hope all who see this project will be able to enjoy this project that will be made out of a place of love for the art form of animation.

SLIDE 24

Th-th-th that's all folks!

The defense script

SLIDE 1 - say hi to everyone

Hello everyone! Thank you all for coming to this thesis defense of What Lies Beyond.

SLIDE 2 - basic info

My name is Andruw Cervantes, I am an animated arts major with a focus on 2D animation. I always liked drawing ever since I was young, and when the time came for me to start thinking about what I wanted to do in life, I eventually decided to pursue 2D animation as a career. I always admired this medium for its challenging, time consuming, yet rewarding process of drawing things over and over again until said things give off the illusion of being alive! I knew going into my thesis that I wanted to create a short film.

SLIDE 3 - The point of this presentation

And that short film is What Lies Beyond! A six minute short film about an alien scientist creating an all-powerful element as a means of faster-than-light travel. In an oh-so shocking turn of events, chaos ensues. The title What Lies Beyond has two meanings. The first meaning comes from the ambition of the main character Nova wanting to invent a method of faster-than-light travel and discover what lies beyond her planet. The second meaning is her world, called planet Chioat, lies beyond the observable universe, which is 93 billion light years across, or 46.5 billion light years from each side of Earth. This short film sees Nova finally achieving her goal, but not without a little trouble.

SLIDE 4 - Inspirations

This short film was the result of a few inspirations. Starting off with Super Mario Bros. Wonder, a video game directed by Shiro Mouri. This entry in the long-running Super Mario series fascinated me with its introduction of the Wonder Flower, a reality-warping power-up that turns everything surrounding it on its head. This was the biggest influence on the story.

Another thing influencing the story was George Lucas' Star Wars, specifically the hyperspace aspect of the films' worldbuilding. Hyperspace is a concept in science fiction where you go so fast, you enter a pocket dimension that makes you travel at speeds far beyond anyone's comprehension.

As for the art style of What Lies Beyond, Tom and Jerry and Looney Tunes were the biggest inspirations for me. I wanted a simple yet appealing style to go along with the comedic tone and fast pacing that I was envisioning for this short film and these two cartoons were very influential. I primarily looked at the original theatrical runs from each series though I also looked at the Looney Tunes movie The Day the Earth Blew Up for additional inspiration. That was a really good movie!

Slides 5-11 - characters

Now, let's move on to the characters you'll be seeing. Starting off, here's Nova! She is an energetic scientist who is a little too passionate about her job and ambition of discovering faster-than-light travel.. After being threatened to get fired by her boss after many failed attempts to realize her vision, she decides to invent a new element that can possibly lead to her goal, only for things to go awry.

Next, up is Orion. He is the coworker and assistant of Nova. Compared to her, Orion is calm, collected, and reserved. While he does share Nova's passion of discovering faster-than-light travel, he wants to do it safely, which for the most part, is what the two have been doing. He is also known for losing his cool in moments of danger, or as shown in this film, when his job is on the line.

Following him, here we have Venus! Venus is an intern for a lower-level position in the same field of work as Nova and Orion, and is Nova's best friend. She's shy, mild-mannered, and eats a lot. She too shares Nova and Orion's desire to discover faster-than-light travel, but she still has to work as a low-level intern before being able to work in a high ranked position as Nova's.

The last alien character I'll be introducing is Stumplump. He's the boss of Nova and Orion who is funding their FTL project. He's generally a nice enough boss but tends to get angry with Nova and Orion due to them constantly failing to discover FTL. In this short, Stumplump has had enough of them going overbudget and threatens to fire them.

Moving on from the alien characters, here is a human character who will be in a scene that justifies the name of this short film. She is an astronomy student at a university who sometimes wonders if aliens are real or not and really enjoys stargazing at night. If you think about it, this human is an alien from Nova's point of view.

And now, the antagonist of this short film, the Volatium! This harbinger of chaos is an all-powerful element Nova created by combining all the elements known to her species, most being the 118 we have discovered and more that these aliens have discovered themselves. She thinks this is the key to the future of her species. It starts out being normal-ish, gaining sentience and doing harmless deeds, before turning into a monster who wants to wreak havoc. The name "volatium" is a combination of the word volatile and the "-ium" suffix. The shape of this element is a combination of circles, squares, and triangles, the three basic shapes of character design shape language. This creature is also unique animation-wise as its coloring style is reminiscent of Chowder and it has a line boil effect similar to Ed, Edd, n' Eddy.

SLIDE 12 - Music disclaimer

In terms of music, I did not have the funds to pay for a composer, so I had to look for music from a variety of video games that conveyed the mood of the various scenes from this short film. Here's a slide of what games I chose music from.

With all that said, I have a very important question for you all: Would you like to see my short film?

PLAY FILM HERE

SLIDE 13 - Reiterating what you just saw

And that was What Lies Beyond. This was an insanely difficult, but rewarding production to experience as a director. While most of the film was done by myself, I also worked with thirteen friends, and together, we animated a nice 69 shots! I did so much. I was the director, producer, editor, storyboarder, voice director, animator, colorist, sound design, some ninth thing I'm probably forgetting. You name it, I did it! Now, I'd like to take the time to talk about how we got to this point.

SLIDE 14 - Origins!

The idea of What Lies Beyond started back in 2023. It was a simpler time, my hair was much shorter, the Target I currently work at just received its 20th job application from me, and Pikmin 4 was about to come out, which made me really excited. I was designing a character for a GIF assignment and this was the result. Old art jumpscare, by the way. I really liked this character and I eventually thought of a story idea that would play around the idea of why aliens have never made contact with humans, with her as the main character. These aliens are trying to create a means of faster than light travel. I looked to Star Wars' hyperspace plot device for story inspiration. According to its lore, some alien species developed it, which made me wonder how I could turn this simple explanation into a story that could be enhanced with the limitless animation medium. After playing Super Mario Bros. Wonder in October of that year, I realized that the Wonder Flower's reality warping properties would be a wonderful way of doing that! This reality-warping power-up is capable of doing anything, which made me link this idea to What Lies Beyond's story. Then, I considered the idea of the Wonder Flower turning into a sentient monster that wants to create chaos. And thus, the Volatium as we know it was born.

SLIDE 15 - Original vision

I originally envisioned What Lies Beyond to treat the Volatium more seriously, and I had envisioned it with a slightly more defined art style and darker tone. I was really big into The Owl House when it was still airing, and that fixation was influential to my art and creative thinking at the time. Eventually, in very late 2024, I started to rethink the

direction of this idea. After watching Looney Tunes Cartoons, a 2020 revival of the Looney Tunes series directed by Peter Browngardt, I asked myself, “what if the Volatium was used in the context of a slapstick comedy?” This led to my thesis becoming the slapstick comedy thesis film it is now. While part of me does wonder what the final product could’ve been had I stuck to its original direction, I still much prefer this comedic direction I decided on in December 2024.

SLIDE 16 - Style studies

During the winter break at this time, I did some style studies before finally settling on the art style that was used for this short film. I deviated from the “serious” looking style and experimented with a 2000’s esque art style, which I ended up deciding against. As I gravitated more towards taking artistic inspiration from Tom and Jerry and Looney Tunes, the art style eventually got finalized to...

SLIDE 17 - Lineart change

This! I still felt something was... off. This is when my friends Jou and Lex suggested I should give her a blue outline to make her look more alien-like. I tested that out and it ended up looking like this! This change genuinely blew my mind! I reacted like this:

SLIDE 18 - The iPhone warthog

SLIDE 19 - PRODUCTION STARTED GO GO GO

I officially started working on What Lies Beyond in January 2025 in the Thesis Critique Seminar class. I started out by finalizing the designs of the six characters from the film and also nailing down the background style. Designing six characters meant having to make six turnaround sheets, which was a lot of work... in a semester that was already intense because I made another, completely unrelated short film at the same time!

SLIDE 20 - Untitled Yuri Cartoon

Whilst beginning work on What Lies Beyond that month, I decided to throw my sanity out the window and make a second, completely unrelated short film for my Animated Short Film class. I polled some friends on some story ideas, and a majority voted on the idea that became Untitled Yuri Cartoon, my first short film. Why did I do this? I wanted to get a feel for the animation pipeline with a simple story idea before diving head first into What Lies Beyond. Somehow, I managed to create a 2.5 minute film almost completely on my own thanks to time management skills, shortcuts taken in the

pipeline, and a decently planned schedule for the semester. Also, shoutout to [Marilyn Zornado](#) for providing us this shot list for that class. It was a fantastic way to keep track of progress for this and What Lies Beyond!

SLIDE 21 - Yeah

After designing the characters and nailing down the background art style, I got to work on storyboarding! They were more so thumbnails than storyboards because I realized I was short on time before my proposal when I got started on storyboards, but hey, drawings are drawings! In the early summer, voices were recorded so I can properly lipsync everyone.

SLIDE 22 - Started animating

During the summer, I did most of the rough animation! I came to school up to four times a week for a total of roughly 30 - 40 hours simply rough animating. Some of my friends also helped me out with this. By the end of the summer break, I was already nearly 40% done with the entire project. In late August, I started to work on cleanup/coloring throughout the entire fall and part of the spring semesters, and I had some additional help during this phase too!

During the cleanup and coloring phases particularly after winter break, I grew a reputation among some folks here for having an insane work ethic. Which entailed waking up as early as 5:30 AM up to three times a week just to do some cleanup at school! I would work until I used up all my creative energy for the day, which was usually at around 5 to 6 PM. It was intense, but was worth it! I also unintentionally conditioned my body to wake up and sleep earlier than I normally did before doing this. Whoops.

SLIDE 23 - Live action stuff

As you all just saw, there were some live action gags and a rotoscoped shot. Incorporating these into the film was an adventure in and of itself! I pitched the live action gags to Izzy Duval, the voice of Nova, and they were on board with this crazy idea. We set up a day to realize this crazy idea at the bottom floor of campus and a lot of crazy hijinks ensued! I wanted this gag to look like a low-budget sort of thing and I'd say I achieved that.

SLIDE 24 - Rotoscope

Speaking of the rotoscope, that same day we recorded footage of me running and falling to create this gag. For those who don't know, rotoscoping is an animation technique where an animator traces over live action footage.. This scene exists because my friend Jou once sent me a rotoscoped Super Mario meme which made me think "dang it I should've added a rotoscope gag". I later thought of a way to incorporate such a gag halfway into production!

SLIDE 25 - Getting even more insane

Throughout production, I had the opportunity to work on four other short films that gave me valuable insight on how I could refine production of my thesis. First, Good Knight Princess with Team Decepticons last January taught me that animation production can crash and burn if you get way too ambitious. Both Lex Rose's thesis film ANUNUGBA and the upcoming 2026 co-lab film Next Gourd Neighbor had convenient organization and communication methods that influenced that aspect of my thesis production.. Finally, working on Is There Redemption? with Team Perchance back In February allowed me an opportunity to composite animation for a bit before doing the same for What Lies Beyond. Am I crazy for working on all of this while making a six minute short film and directing thirteen people? Perchance.

SLIDE 26 - Finish!!!!

Eventually, at the end of February, I got started on compositing and sound design, which went by faster than I thought! And after doing all of that whilst juggling five classes a semester and a weekend job, What Lies Beyond was finally completed on March 30th, 2026, two weeks before Focus Week started. To my fellow animators who have proposed or will propose a short film this week, I better be setting an example for you all. Making an animated short film mostly on your own is extremely time consuming so you better plan around this for the next year of your lives. And you better have some friends to help you during production. A little help can and will go a long way. But anyways, when I checked off that last box and saw that mythical 100%, I was ecstatic. A year of hard work culminated to that very moment. After cheering with my friends for a bit, I immediately went back home to celebrate this momentous achievement. I celebrated by booting up my Nintendo Switch 2 to start a video game I had waited for so long to finally play: Donkey Kong Bananza.

This is the part where you go in the room behind you and start wearing the onesie.

SLIDE 27 - The part where I talk about Donkey Kong Bananza

If you know me, you HAD to have known this was coming. For those who don't know, early on in production, I restrained myself from not playing most new game releases until the completion of What Lies Beyond. This included Donkey Kong Bananza, a game I was not shy about expressing my excitement for. As a huge Donkey Kong fan who already waited eleven years for a new game, I was willing to wait a few more months to play this until my thesis was done. I even had the physical game near me as I was working on this project. This in turn, led to Bananza being an integral part of What Lies Beyond's production. After finally playing it, I can say it was worth the restraint! It's genuinely one of the best 3D platformers out there. If I had a dollar for every time I have been called strong-willed, crazy, or psychologically torturing myself, I'd have enough to pay off my student loans!

I'd love to talk more about this game, but unfortunately (for me), I gotta keep talking about my thesis, so sorry DK, but we gotta move on. (Play video of DK dying here)

SLIDE 28 - The future

So now, what lies beyond for me? Well, after I take a much needed break when I graduate, I am going to be banished to the cintiq mines once more, as I have agreed to help a lot of my friends who worked on my thesis to work on theirs, a lot of whom are proposing or have already proposed this week. I'm going to use these opportunities to improve my portfolio and to be more versatile in animating in different art styles. As for What Lies Beyond itself, I can't submit it to film festivals or publicly upload it online because of its use of copyrighted music. Eventually I'll hire a freelance composer to make original music, and from that point I'll explore options on publically showing this work. In terms of this universe I created, I'm not done with these characters. I do want to create a show bible for myself so I can fully figure out and understand these characters I've created, as well as other characters I've been ideating on and create wild stories with them, and building rigs on the animation software Moho. I'm thinking of starting out with short form content online since that's what's been getting people's attention in the animation world nowadays, even if an alarming amount of that animated content is unfortunately AI slop.

SLIDE 29 - closing

I want to say thank you to Za for being my mentor in this journey. I greatly appreciate the critiques you gave that ended up improving aspects of my film. I also want to thank the rest of my panel for taking time out of their busy schedules to show up! I want to give a bigger thank you to my mom for being supportive of me as I am reaching the end

of my academic journey. Her ability to persevere even as she was dealt with unfortunate circumstances was an inspiration for me to work on my thesis.

Now, can everyone who worked on *What Lies Beyond* please stand up? Whether you were a voice actor, background artist, or animator, your contributions to this project means the world to me and I am forever grateful for you guys taking time out of your busy lives to help me. I am honored to call you my friends.

And to everyone in the audience, thank you for showing up to this defense.

With all of that being said, do you want to see this short film one more time?

(play short film again)

Hey there. I know you're reading other people's thesis presentation scripts for inspiration, myself included. I assume you're an animator looking at our fellow animators' speeches. If you've seen *What Lies Beyond* or have even attended my defense for this cartoon, thank you so much for attending. I appreciate that a lot. You've come a long way since the day you started attending PNCA, whether you started as a first year, or in my case, a transfer student. You have a lot of work ahead of you, and I am happy to see that you've come this far. Whether you're about to defend your thesis or just about to start, great days await you at the end of this journey, and don't you ever forget that. It helps if you have a motivator like how I used the aforementioned Donkey Kong game as a post-thesis reward. Anyways, I'm starting to ramble. If you made it this far, thanks for reading my spiel. More importantly, good luck with your thesis! It's going to be a long and hectic journey, but trust me, it's gonna be so rewarding when you finally finish it! Keep making great things and enjoy your remaining time at PNCA!

- Andruw Cervantes, April 26th, 2026