

Good Afternoon, and thank you all so much for coming to my Senior Thesis: Elevate. My name is Tessa Ernsperger. I am an animation major with a minor in stop-motion.

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Even since I was very young I have been obsessed with film. I was obsessed with cameras, so much so that whenever my mom would film home videos, I would beg to see what was going on. My obsession with animation, however, began 13 years ago in 2012 when the film Rise of the Guardians by Dreamworks was released. I was obsessed with that movie, and did everything in my power to learn about how it was made, and was introduced into the amazing world of animation. A few years later down the road I was introduced to the Stop Motion Industry through the movie Kubo and the Two Strings by Laika Studios. I was floored. Soon I was doing all kinds of research into how that movie was made, even making a youtube playlist of Laika's technical aspects. I wanted to learn as much as I could. I was obsessed with movie-making.

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I have always been interested in the arts, ever since I was young. I loved drawing, sculpting, and I loved to tell stories. Whenever there was a creative writing assignment in school I would write so much that I would have to borrow more paper from my peers.

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Sculpting is also one of my favorite hobbies. I especially loved making replicas of props in TV shows that I loved. I especially love creating small things, tiny paper boats so small they could fit on a fingernail.

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I love creating things that resonate with people. I love pushing the boundaries of what I can make, and going above and beyond as much as I can to achieve my goal, to the point that these days I can't hold back, even when people tell me that my idea may be too much. I like making cute little guys in a happy and fun story that brings a smile to people's faces and lifts the spirit, and that is what I wish to achieve in my thesis film, Elevate.

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Somedays, leaving the comfort of my house can be hard. Sometimes it can be almost impossible to get out of bed. Being home is comforting, safe, and warm. You don't have to worry about talking to strangers, being in terrible weather, or getting hurt by something out of your control. Sometimes it feels easier to just ignore the outside world and stay in your comfort zone. But when you do this, you sacrifice something important. Experience. If one stays indoors all the time, you miss out on life. You miss making new friends, you miss the possibility of having fun and discovering new things, and you miss

out on seeing the world. I have a personal anxiety about doing new things and stepping out of my own comfort zone. This film was important for me to make because it helped enhance my skill of storytelling, animating, and character design. It also helped me get better at backgrounds, movement, and color. My method of working was studying agoraphobia and how people have overcome it. Agoraphobia is a type of panic disorder where people will avoid social situations and being in public in fear of a panic attack, being ridiculed, judged, and generally their own personal safety. My character, Arlo, suffers from agoraphobia. To accurately portray his emotions throughout his story, I have been researching agoraphobia, how it feels, and how people have overcome this panic disorder. From the article Ben's story, he says, "I suffered from acute agoraphobia: I was terrified to leave the house. I wouldn't ride on planes, trains or any form of public transport. I was terrified of being caught in traffic jams, lifts, shopping centres, open spaces, crowds and especially hot, crowded rooms." (Ben's Story). I wished to explore the difficulties one would face when forced out of their comfort zone, the emotions and feelings that one would have when this happened, and how one would accept these changes in their lives so I can accurately portray that feeling in my film and in my character. A life stuck indoors and away from the wonders of the world is not a life worth living, and that is what I wished to explore in my Thesis Film.

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My thesis film, Elevate, is about a ghost who haunts a house he lives in. He loves his home, and even though the film opens with him gazing curiously outside, he is afraid of

the outside world. He'd rather fly and bob around the house, knocking things over and ignoring the outside world. It isn't until he accidentally locks himself out of his home and finds a rainbow umbrella that he sees the wonders of the world. Albeit, he isn't quite complacent with the idea from the start, but once he sees a beautiful sunset he finally accepts his new world.

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When I was creating my ghosts character design, I wanted to keep it simple so it would be easy to animate, but super cute and inviting. I wanted him to have a long, curly tail that he uses to grab onto things and I created him to look kind of like a beluga whale. I did this because belugas are super cute, playful, and pure white, just like he is.

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I was inspired by the Pixar short film *The Blue Umbrella*. This film was created by Saschka Unseld, and he was inspired one day when he stumbled upon a lone umbrella sitting against a curb. I was inspired by the simple storytelling of inanimate objects moving a story along. Umbrella's are an amazing way to animate movement and tell a compelling story that symbolizes change and adventure, and I wanted to replicate that feeling in my own film. The movement in Unseld's film has influenced my own in terms of how to properly animate umbrellas.

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The character design of this film are inspired by the film series Ghost Choir by Louie Zong, which is a short youtube series of ghosts singing harmonically to each other. I remember watching these films all the time, especially around the Halloween season. I loved the cute little character designs of the ghosts, and how they only sang and never spoke. It was simple and beautiful. Ghosts are always a fun staple in storytelling, and Louie's Ghosts inspired my own in terms of character design and to also only use music in my film and no dialogue.

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My biggest influence for my film is the composer Matthew J Webster. He is an Australian based music composer and musical director from Canberra and has won multiple awards for his music . The piece that inspired me the most, and the one that I used in my Thesis, is First Light. When I found this song a little over three years ago, it was completely by accident. At the time, I had been looking for a song that fit the theme of my story, but couldn't find anything good enough for the feeling I was trying to provoke. But one night I stumbled upon Webster's song while messing around with my Spotify homepage, and the rest is history. This piece helped inform my research by inspiring me to look into the technical designs of my film. The music helped me imagine different colors and expressions, the music inspired different movements and emotions, and has also inspired me to do more research on the different kinds of storm clouds and

what they may look like during a sunset after a large storm. I also was able to receive permission from Matthew J Webster to use his song first light in my film.

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To create this film I used a lot of different programs to achieve my vision. I used the drawing program Krita to create all of my backgrounds, storyboards, character designs, and concept art. When I began this film, I first planned everything out with storyboards.

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I made a lot of storyboards for this film. I had to plan everything out, every little scene and movement. Honestly, I planned so much that I had to cut some things out for time constraints. Here are just a few storyboards, showing the last minute and a half of my film.

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For this film I had to make a LOT of backgrounds. These are just a few, and each one took a lot of time to make. Some took less time, like the backgrounds at the beginning of the film or the ones with less screen time, but the important backgrounds were developed very carefully.

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For example, with this background I started out by making a simple sketch of what my vision was. This background was of the corner of a building, with a grand cumulonimbus cloud rising behind it, and the ghost would come soaring dramatically over the building, before continuing his journey.

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I then created a lineart layer. The skeleton of a background; mapping out where everything goes and what angles we see everything at. The final design is based off of this basic drawing.

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Next I block out all of the different tones and shadows, adding more details and blocking out shapes.

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Then, finally, I add color, texture, tone, and lighting. Out of all of my backgrounds I have ever made ever, this one is my all time favorite. I put a lot of effort and time into this background, and I am very proud of how it turned out.

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For this film, I kept the scale at 1920 x 1080 and the colors dull at first but become brighter and more vivid as the film progresses. I used Adobe Audition to edit my music and sound effects. From the moment I completed a scene I've been using Premiere Pro to map out everything, then as I progressed I used it to piece my clips, sound, music, and credits together. For effects like rain and warping, I used Adobe After Effects. But I entirely animated this film in Toon Boom Harmony.

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When I began to animate my film Elevate, I decided to animate it entirely in Toon Boom Harmony. The thing is, though, I had never used Toon Boom before. I had only ever used TVPaint to animate, which is an animation program mostly used by France, and, also, I don't like it. It was always really frustrating to use and I had heard so many good things about Toon Boom. Plus, in the States its used more often over TVPaint, like with shows such as Rick and Morty, or Helluva Boss, so I figured that if I came out of this experience by knowing at least the basics, the knowledge I learn could possibly help me find a career in the future. So, in the span of just a couple of months I taught myself Toon Boom Harmony, with the help of my mentor Chris Purdin, and a handful of youtube tutorials. Though it wasn't an easy feat. Animating almost 30 scenes in a little less than three months is not a lot of time, while also making backgrounds and editing

everything together all at the same time, but thankfully Toon Boom has an amazing tool to animate faster, a tool known as deformers. In the slide shown above, you can see a fully rigged character that was made using deformers, and I would like to take this time to explain what deformers are and how to animate with them.

In Toon Boom's official website, they state that Deformations work by creating control points on a drawing and, when you move those points, the drawing is bent or distorted so that the parts of a drawing that are bound to a control point follow that control point wherever you position it. It is a lot like stop motion, but in 2D instead of 3D. This was great for me, since even though I have a minor in stop motion, and I would like to go into the stop motion industry one day, my Thesis was a little too much to make in stop motion, and I had been planning this film for years, so nothing was going to stop me from making it. There were just too many changing backgrounds with the limited resources I had, so if I wanted to make it work I would have to green-screen the whole thing. It was just simpler to create the film in 2D. But since I was animating with deformers, it was as if I was animating in stop motion anyways. A win is a win.

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For example, first you would want to draw your character. Luckily for me, my character was fairly simple, I liked to call it a ball on a string. Then you would need to add a peg to your drawing. A peg is a special type of layer to help transform your drawing, so once you started to make any changes, it wouldn't affect or warp your original drawing.

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Then, once you were ready for the deformers, you would go to the topmost toolbar, and select the rigging tool, which I call the Hammer Button, cause it's a little hammer!

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After that, you would set up your rig. For my ghost, I started at the very top of his head, and made 6 points in total all the way down his spine and to the tail. Then, still using the hammer tool, I would adjust each point and enlarge every circle within every point to fit across the figure.

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After that, you're free to animate and move your character however you want! It's saves a lot on time, and it can be more fluid than traditional animation.

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All in all, using these influences, techniques, materials, and research I created my Thesis film Elevate. The driving force behind this film was a message about stepping out of one's comfort zone and letting chance take you on a wild ride. I believe that this

film is compelling because many people have a hard time getting out of their homes and leaving the comfort of their safety net, especially after the events of covid-19 and the lockdown. I also believe that this film is important because I have a personal anxiety about doing new things and stepping out of my own comfort zone. This work was important for me to make because it helped enhance my skill of storytelling, animating, and character design. It also helped me get better at backgrounds, movement, and color. I wished to explore the difficulties one would face when forced out of their comfort zone, the emotions and feelings that one would have when something like this happens, and how one would accept these changes in their lives so I could accurately portray that feeling in my film and in my character. I used my inspirations to help me work on character designs, movement, and color and I combined all of these things to create my 2D animated film about a ghost who, after getting cast out of his home, finds an umbrella and goes on an amazing adventure.

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Thank you!