

BANANA KING

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Parsons The New School for Design in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design and Technology

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Thesis production website:
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Abstract

Banana King tells the comical tale of the conflict between a monkey father and his son, Max. Max's desire to be a graffiti artist and his father's inability to accept or understand Max's passion create a perpetual tension in their daily lives at the family banana shop. Though their relationship generates much anger and friction, exaggerated facial expressions paired with quirky animation set an entertaining and whimsical tone. *Banana King* targets adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 and uses 3D animation to bring to life the funky monkey world with a soundtrack of chimpanzee whoops and screams to communicate the simple story line and conflict. The story allows anyone who has had a strict parent to take a humorous perspective on an otherwise difficult relationship.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following people for their wonderful encouragement and guidance:

Liling Tien
Jean D'Onofrio
James Fisher
Louisa Campbell
Barbara Morris
Christopher Romero
Anezka Sebek

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Impetus

Banana King is an exploration of a father-son relationship and how this relationship affects the child's behavior and choices in life. A child who is born in the United States and raised by immigrant parents deals with issues unlike those of an American child with native parents. The child faces the constant challenge of balancing his or her traditional family values with academic and social influences from the American culture. This discord permeates an individual's psychological and physical state with anxiety towards identity. The child may invent lies, create facades, or actively rebel in order to cope with opposing forces of parental expectation and social acceptance among peers. Thus, what better way to approach an issue of cultural identity crisis, than with humor and entertainment?

As a Chinese American, I often encounter disagreements with my father that originate from a dispute between culture and generation. Through my frustrating adolescent years, I have discovered that a humorous outlook helps me tolerate and ignore seemingly vindictive actions from my father. When I recount a quarrel or incident to a family member or a friend, I am sure to sarcastically narrate, embellish, and exaggerate the events. It is this technique of humor and sarcasm that helps me to communicate any anxieties from the conflict and simultaneously engage the audience. It is also a method I use in all of the stories I tell.

Thus, storytelling serves a therapeutic effect and proposes an alternate perspective to conflicts and

relationships. *Banana King* follows the well-known saying of “Laughter is the best medicine”. Adding humor to the father-son quarrel reinforces a positive attitude on a serious and heated situation. Humor also serves as an artistic and literary challenge. These elements of tradition, whimsy, and animation work together to represent a metaphor for those who struggle with cultural inconsistencies and a generation gap and thus these elements manifest themselves as a remedy for grief.

An additional motive behind the plot choices in *Banana King* is to reveal that parents can indeed be fallible. While their intentions are seemingly practical and judgments seemingly rational, it is safe to state that a child can and will outwit the parent. Max’s form of rebellion appears random and ludicrous to his father, but Max ultimately and ironically helps his father succeed.

The method of 3D computer animation not only allows for the exaggerative qualities of a character’s facial expression and body movement, but also gives the hint of reality in a fantastic sense since the audience is viewing a simulation of animated monkeys. Watching characters move in a space and live in a world we can relate to, despite the fact that they may be of a different species, gives tangible and imaginative qualities to the overall piece. Seeing the story of a discordant relationship between two monkeys tells the audience that the specific details of the conflict may be different than their experience, but the underlying parent-child tension due to generation and culture can exist even in the world of monkeys.

1.2 Concept + Design

The tale of *Banana King* attempts to marry elements of conflict and comedy with slight Chinese stylistic influences. How can the narrative be portrayed with specific attention to color, scale, texture, set design, and quite importantly in 3D, with lighting? What characteristics can be taken from the Chinese culture to communicate humor and tension? How much cultural influence is just enough? Not enough? Too much?

The decision to make the two main characters monkeys is an obvious humor device. I could have created a literal representation of my experience, with a father-daughter story using actual human beings. However, it is much more entertaining to watch monkeys, our closest genetic relatives, and use the medium of animation to the fullest extent. I also feared any misconceptions that people may develop when presented with a narrative about a father and daughter. It is common to perceive interactions and emotions in this type of relationship as metaphors for future sexual relations or feminist issues. Thus, my choice to make a male protagonist instead of a female lead allows me to prevent any unintentional Freudian interpretations and avoid gender issues, so that the story is communicated effectively. In any case, anthropomorphic monkeys simply scream hilarity.

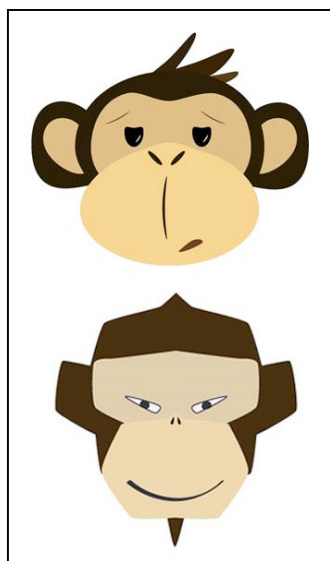


Figure 1: Max's Curious-George-like design (top) and his final edgier design (bottom).

Heavy consideration was placed upon character development. The monkeys are stylized with large heads, thin limbs, and sharp edges. In earlier stages, Max was portrayed with a softer image. He resembled a Curious-George-like monkey, with a very round face and solid

colored discs for eyes. He appeared peaceful with a subtle anger brewing beneath. In order to adhere to his urban-graffiti style, Max evolved into an edgier monkey with protruding eyebrows and a funkier coat of purple-brown fur. The fur around his wrists and ankles flares out to reflect his hip personality, and the color represents his artistic side. I sculpted his mouth and created chunky teeth to add to his juvenile appearance. (See Appendix A)

Max's father evolved in similar fashion. His features are sharpened and his head is more square than Max's, which illustrates his narrow-mindedness. The grimace on his face signifies his constant infuriation with Max's insubordination. Like Max, his Father too has flares at his wrists and ankles - though muted. His grey-brown coat portrays his old age and practice of tradition. The "Fu-Manchu" moustache indicates Chinese descent and consequently his Chinese values. (See Appendix A)



Figure 2: Examples of Chinese temple roofs. (flickr.com, 2007)

Banana King is set in a hut that is surrounded by a jungle, inhabited by monkeys. How will this setting reflect a world of Chinese monkeys? Not only is the hut made of bamboo, but also the surrounding foliage contains bamboo plants and palm trees. The bamboo huts derive their architectural influences from the East Asian temples. Known for their furling edges and iconic status; religious temples are a trademark of Eastern culture. My bamboo hut borrows heavily from generic Chinese temples typical long, curved cement planks upon a temple's roof, while the store utilizes the natural curvature of over-grown bananas to highlight the curled roof edges.



Figure 3: Jungle scene from Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967).



Figure 4: Bamboo hut and thatch roof design.

The color and texture of the hut is also strongly influenced by those from Disney's *The Jungle Book*. The walls are made of faded tan bamboo with a herringbone pattern and cool maroon bamboo stalks provide support at the seams and decorate the hut with a contrasting trim. (See Appendix B)

In conjunction with visuals, the music and sound design of the piece contribute to the narrative concept and design. What kind of music will best suit Max's special moments in the film, while staying true to the set and character design? As he begins his artistic expression, in the form of vandalism, the melody and beat express his attitude and mindset. A jazzy, playful, hip-hop theme with a hint of Chinese flavor is suitable for his character. The piece begins with jungle-flavored drums and Chinese mandolin melodies and Chinese bamboo flute notes accent the fast-paced rhythm.

The music is influenced by the modern band, *Gorillaz*, whose songs contain elements of alternative rock, electronica, and hip-hop. The melody also combines beats from funk artists, *Booker T. & the MG's*, and tidbits from the playful guitar of *Django Reinhardt*.

Chapter 2: Domains + Precedents

2.1 Domains

The constant tension and power struggle between parent and child is a common staple in any family, especially in the adolescent years. Parents take on the responsibility to guide their child's actions and the child conversely intends to manage his or her life independently. However, this relationship varies greatly with different cultures. In the Chinese culture, the family has always played a central role in an individual's daily routines and relations. Many Chinese Americans deal with the challenge of balancing and respecting both cultural influences and living within two cultures. One specific area of difficulty is that of education. Chinese parents are known to be very strict with their children. The expectation to perform at a high level can be great pressure to a child-seeking acceptance from his or her parents. Some children are driven to apathy, anxiety, and depression.

Foreign views on Chinese families tend to "give a much more pessimistic, even negative view of the traditional family, when compared with the idealistic descriptions of the classics" (Saso 9). Michael Saso lived in China and studied the sociology of Chinese families for over twenty years. He has made intriguing observations, conducted case studies, and aided in experiments with results affirming differences between Chinese and American family values. One such experiment was an adapted form of the Thematic Apperceptive Test (TAT). In the test, five photographs are presented to Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino(a))

and American students where they are asked to create a story from the situations depicted. “Chinese students were very explicit about explaining the meaning of *hsiao* (xiao) parent-child relationships in stories” (Saso 126). The first picture given to the students show a family consisting of a mother, father, and child. The most commonly recurring words in more than 60% of the responses from Chinese students were “children must respect their parents, look after them when they get old” (Saso 124). A couple common American responses to this picture were “I wanted to get away from home during college” and “I’m working, don’t ask folks for money” (Saso 125). From these responses, it is obvious that Americans lean towards and aspire to independence from their families, both physically and financially. While financial stability and education are important to the Chinese, the notion of taking care of family and elders is greatly stressed. Any inclination towards rebellion or disrespect is constrained or immediately scolded.

Attempting to harmonize influences from Chinese and American societies can prove stressful and cause an individual to question identity and relationships. Amidst the regret, anger, and sadness one can turn to humor and laughter in an effort to cope. “Humour has an immense impact in easing social conflicts, relieving tensions, and promoting order” (Fry 248). Thus, *Banana King* tells a humorous story of the tension between a monkey father and son, in an effort to offer a satiric perspective to a frustrating, oppositional, and discordant relationship.

Comedy, humor, ridicule, wit, and the ludicrous promote the act of laughter. Researchers, more specifically

therapists and psychoanalysts, believe laughter and humor may be the best medicine. Laughter positively affects a human being's blood flow, immune response, and blood sugar levels (cbsnews.com). "Whenever we can prick a vital point in our neighbor, whenever we can find a weak spot in our fellow beings, in their manners, beliefs, institutions, and ideals, there we invariably find the ludicrous" (Sidis 39). Max's weak spot is his relationship with his father. He resents the beliefs his father forces upon him, but at the same time wants to please his elder because he loves him and seeks acceptance. Using this and twisting it into a humorous narrative makes the story interesting and entertaining.

Animation, specifically 3D computer animation, is more often than not associated with humor. Disney is an important leader of the animation domain and Pixar (previously owned by Disney) has dominated the 3D CG field, with Dreamworks as a close competitor. Both companies produce films that have changed the way society is accustomed to seeing animation. Not only do they practice traditional animation principles, such as squash and stretch techniques from Looney Tunes animator Tex Avery, but they also give audiences a completely different environment to absorb. Lighting and textures in 3D animation simultaneously fool audiences into thinking these cartoons are part of our reality thus expanding the boundaries of our imagination.

Banana King uses 3D computer effects and animation in context with its time. As time progresses, film audiences become accustomed to a certain look and feel, a realistic feel. Looking back on earlier films, such as Pixar's *A Bug's*

Life, I can see how far CG has come in the past ten years. The materials are less detailed and make the objects appear more solid and toy-like. Jumping forward to a recent Pixar production like *Ratatouille*, we can see how the technology has evolved to use features like sub-surface scattering, to make the mice ears exhibit a transparency in the skin. The textures are vibrant and alive and contribute to the reality of the story. The audience is free to believe that this world exists and these visuals allow them to immerse themselves into a greater imagination.

2.2 Precedents



Figure 5: French 3D animated short *Versus*.

The French animated short *Versus* is a superb example of a whimsical tale, depicting a serious situation (war), with subtle visual references to Asian culture. It is the initial inspiration for *Banana King* in terms of creating a witty 3D animation of Asian influence. The pace varies and helps the story stay interesting despite the repetitive back and forth attacks between samurai clans. Both sides use assorted tactics in attempt to conquer the island between them. The timing starts off slow, detailing each method each team uses. Anticipation is created by gradually making each shot shorter so the speed of their techniques increases and finally both clans rush to the middle island and are forced to freeze or else they will sink the island and die.



Figure 6: Samurai clans from *Versus*.

Here, the Japanese samurai influence stylistically creates an ironically sophisticated composition. Samurai are known as servants of the lord who represent noble and courageous warriors. Their figures have been glorified in many comics, novels, and films. The characters in *Versus*

elegantly embody the strong samurai of the past with their traditional armor and weapons. At the same time, the simple softness and desaturation of the costume textures and colors add a gentle, likeable quality to the characters. This cultural inspiration is far from overwhelming and even creates comedy in the character design. For example, both leaders of the two clans are much shorter and have the largest helmets of any troop in their army. This minor detail adds a witty twist to the characters because often a leader is bigger and stronger than the fleet he commands. *Versus* also pairs modern references with old-fashioned practices in different battle techniques. At times, a team uses contemporary methods such a gas-powered rocket, trampoline or teleportation device. Other times traditional weapons or strategies likely found in samurai eras, such as the cannon ball and the javelin is used. Finally, the piece comically ends with a cameo from a pop-icon, Godzilla, who gigantically towers over and treats the conflux of armies as a golf ball on the tee of an island. The large-scale addition of Godzilla delightfully takes the story of the samurai battle out of context, while keeping the overall Japanese influence.

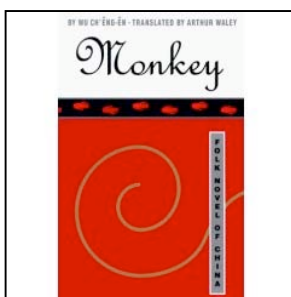


Figure 7: *Monkey*

Wu Ch'eng en's legend of the Chinese monkey king serves as the influence behind *Banana King's* monkey characters, Max's personal tag, the shop name, and several other subtle details. In the earlier stages of *The Son of the Monkey King*, many details from Wu's original tale are used to guide the path of the narrative. The translation by Arthur Waley successfully portrays the original playfulness intended in the traditional monkey king adventures and consequently influenced the motivation behind a whimsical tale. As the

story transformed into *Banana King* the monkey characters and hilarity remained and even escalated in response to the new subject matter.



Figure 8: Pixar's *The Incredibles*

Pixar's *The Incredibles* is a fine example of creative and whimsical 3D animation. Producer Brad Bird as well as the dozens of animators who helped in the creative process, stress the fact that their human characters are not made to resemble reality. Bird's character designs stylistically follow retro influences from the 1960's with a futuristic touch. His characters are humans, and move with just enough resemblance to reality that we can believe their gestures and body positions. At the same time they serve as cartoons that entertain us with exaggerated, elastic contortions and ridiculously quick movements.

Bird also stresses the "mundane versus fantastic" theme that permeates through the film. This reiterates the reality versus cartoon aspect. *The Incredibles* uses the mundane subject of a normal family: husband, wife, son, daughter, and gives them all fantastic super-hero powers. Similarly, *Banana King* uses a tradition versus modernity theme by employing monkey king references in conjunction with the modern trend of graffiti art.



Figure 9: Alex from Dreamworks' *Madagascar*.

Dreamworks' *Madagascar* presents similar concepts as *Incredibles* as it utilizes Tex Avery-like techniques and retro-style characters. Alex, the main character, is a lion with sharp contours. His mane resembles an inverted pentagon and the fingers on his paws are squarer shaped than realistically round.

Max and his father are designed in similar fashion with square eyebrow and jaw lines. The speed of the

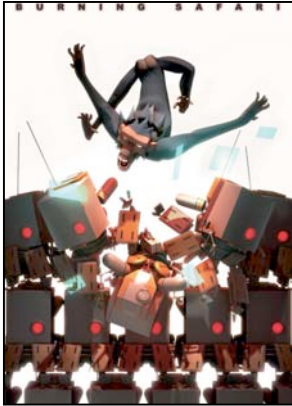


Figure 10: *Burning Safari*
(burning-safari.com, 2008)



Figure 11: Jamie Hewlett
Monkey King illustration

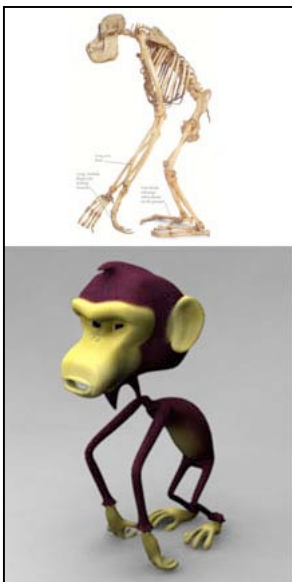


Figure 12: Gorilla skeleton
and 3D model of Max

character animation is noticeably squashed, stretched, and slapstick. Several moments where Max's father grows angry will depict the same fast and frivolous animation.

Madagascar proves that 3D animation can be as elastic and goofy as the traditional Warner Brothers or Loony Tunes cartoons.

Another animation reference, which happens to use a monkey as its main character is the 3D animated short *Burning Safari*. Again, the animation does not attempt to resemble real life movements, but accelerated and exaggerated body movements. The monkey hops and swings his arms violently and quickly and the little machines exhibit their walk cycles and emotions with quick and quirky animation.

The primary influence behind the actual look and feel of the characters is an illustrator named Jamie Hewlett. He is most commonly known for his illustrations and animations for the musical group, *Gorillaz*. Hewlett has recently created illustrations for the modern opera adaption of the *Journey to the West* tale. Max and his father are most heavily influenced by Hewlett's characters facial expressions and edgy style.

When considering the posture of the characters, real model chimpanzees, gorillas, and monkeys are key to achieving a well-rounded character. *Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees* contains educational and entertaining footage of the behavior of chimpanzees. The following images are taken from Ian Redmond's *Gorilla, Monkey, & Ape*. The skeletons are especially useful in understanding how to create their fundamental features and accurately rig the characters for optimal performance in their 3D environment.

Max's character initially began with stylistic influences from the cute and cuddly Curious George. While preparing for the voice recordings, I watched and listened to the monkey voice of Curious George because I wanted a similar likeable tone for Max, but not as childlike. I also referenced his facial expressions with his large smiles and curious appearances.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Story

The narrative in *Banana King* has transformed immensely from its birth. In earlier stages, the story was titled *The Son of the Monkey King*, where Max is the son of the Chinese monkey king. He is forced and pestered by his father to study for the Scholastic Immortality Test (S.I.T.). The S.I.T. is a parody of the well-known Scholastic Aptitude Test (S.A.T.) that all students in the United States must take in order to apply for college. It represents a turning point in their adolescence and a step into making a choice for their goals, career, and adulthood. The S.A.T. is a reasoning test to assess a student's ability to analyze and solve problems in order to prepare them for college. Teenagers, the target audience for *Banana King*, are often stressed by their parents to perform well on this standardized test. I was cleverly bribed by my father, at the ripe age of 11, to study for the S.A.T. and despised every moment of it. Thus, the S.I.T. is used to represent all of the same pressures and tension the S.A.T. produces.

Many of the details in this story were based upon the original legend of the Chinese monkey king, which is about five hundred years old. The king was born out of a heavenly stone and consequently embodied abilities greater than that of his common village monkeys. The commoners elected him king of their society. However, he had to work hard to achieve and demonstrate the true extent his wonderful powers. The king was bored with his village life and decided he wanted to be immortal. Through diligent studying, the king

obtained immortal status by mastering clever fighting skills, the ability to soar swiftly among the clouds, and hundreds of magical transformations.

In *The Son of the Monkey King*, the three skills of fighting, cloud soaring, and magic are used as sections within the S.I.T. The tale begins with Max studying for his exam and he attempts to master the last skill of magic transformation. The story uses this premise and went through four different animatic iterations. The first three used voice over and the final fourth did not. All four versions use Max as the protagonist and his father as the opposing figure. Each iteration attempts to give Max a motivation and purpose, while emphasizing his father's pressure to succeed. Unfortunately, the narrative path began to fall victim to the voice over and struggled to find a happy marriage between using the traditional details from the monkey king legend and the conflicting father-son relationship.

3.1.1 Iteration I

The Son of the Monkey King's first iteration is told by an American female voice over who illustrates a serious and slightly unintentional melancholy tone. (See Appendix C). Her voice over accompanies a classical piano soundtrack that contributes to the somber mood. She tells the story of a frustrated Max, who cannot magically transform one of his monkey hairs into another monkey. Every time Max attempts the magic trick, his hair turns into a fruit and his best friend, Hank, eats the delicious hair-turned-fruit. Hank is a pig and is used here as a reference to the original legend (where the monkey king had a pig as a best friend and confidant). The

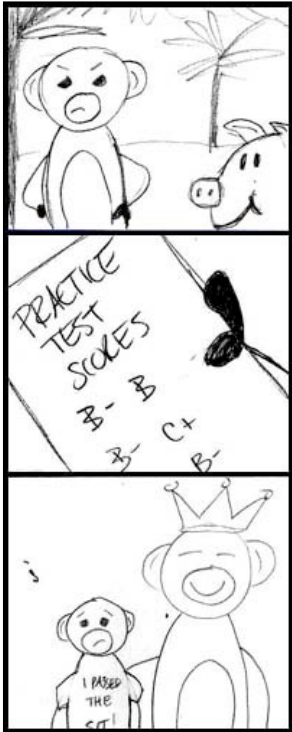


Figure 13: Iteration I storyboards

narrator explains Max's sorrows and his longing to reach his mortal mother. She, like Max, opposes his father's religion of immortality and left his father because she did not want to force the immortal ways upon her son.

Max's failure to perform well on his practice S.I.T. tests pushes him towards apathy and depression. His exam day approaches and he cannot master the cloning transformation. He thinks about his father's expectations and how proud his father will be if he successfully passes the test. He also thinks about how he does not want to be immortal like his father and does not understand the need for immortality. Max's plight is resolved by his cowardly decision to run away from his strict father and find his mortal mother. On exam day, Max is nowhere to be found and the king is left alone to realize his passion for immortality has pushed his wife and son away.

3.1.2 Iteration II

The second version uses a British male narrator to consequently give a light, sophisticated, and more whimsical tone. His narration is continuous in the first half of the story, but abruptly stops towards the end. The story begins like the first in which Max is trying to change a hair into a clone of himself. Here, Raymond Scott's "Huckleberry Duck" is used with the voice over. The playful trumpets and marching band-like beats are reminiscent of classic Warner Brothers cartoons. A new (inanimate) character is introduced to provide Max guidance in his frustrating hour. A stone represents his grandfather and is also a reference to the original monkey king legend as the stone, which gave birth to



Figure 14: Iteration II storyboards

king. The sunrays hit the grass by the grandfather stone and a fire ensues. Max realizes the key to solving the cloning transformation is fire! He ignites his hair and it magically turns into a monkey clone of himself! On Max's exam day, he is so excited and anxious that when it comes time to perform the cloning trick, he pulls out a fistful of hair. The tuft of hair ignites and to his surprise the flame grows into a large ball of fire and ironically burns him to death. His ambitious choice to use many hairs ultimately dooms his success. Max's father is left with his ashes, which are placed in an urn by the king's servants. The king proceeds to the holy temple where he puts Max's urn on a shelf with many other urns of his past children. The final scene shows the monkey king distraught, disappointed, and depressed at the fact he has pushed all of his children to death.

The ending serves as irony for both characters. By desperately trying to gain acceptance from his father, Max unfortunately kills himself. The scene and timing is meant to reference wacky Looney Tunes antics, like that of the coyote and roadrunner, with quick shots of the fire and Max's expression contrast from arrogance to sheer panic. Max's demise, teaches his father a valuable lesson in which he realizes he has pushed his children, literally, to death. Maybe with his next monkey child, he will allow him or her to choose a path that does not involve achieving immortality.

3.1.3 Iteration III

The third story is extremely similar to the second version except for the fact that the voice over permeates through the whole piece. The second version uses the British voice over mostly in the beginning and he trails off towards the end of the story. This confused the audience and left them wondering where the narrator had gone. Previously, the grandfather stone simply igniting from sunrays seemed arbitrary and awkward. With this third version, the grandfather stone does not randomly fire, Max angrily throws pebbles at the stone to start the fire. All other story beats and aspects were left the same, but the overall message and tone needed more work.

3.1.4 Iteration IV



Figure 15: Iteration IV storyboards

One of the most important things in a story is what a character wants. *The Son of the Monkey King* shows what Max did not want. He did not want what his father wanted him to do, he did not want to be an immortal monkey. Why? At first it was because he was not performing well, Max was a failure. Then in later iterations, his grandfather hints to him how to obtain immortality so his father can finally accept him. Unfortunately, this is not what he wants and ironically, he kills himself. The fourth version of Max's predicament gives him a desire. In order to play on the humor, Max is given the desire of fire. Instead of studying to be an honored immortal, Max rather enjoys being a pyromaniac. Finally, there exists a push and pull. Max and his father retreat to a battle between pyromania and studying. The story begins with Max staring blankly at S.I.T. manuals, but he flashes back to instances of

his pyromania. No voice over is used, but music demonstrates the difference between Max's studying scenes and his pyromania flashbacks. The scenes of him studying at his stone desk are accompanied by a slow Django Reinhardt tune and his fire flashbacks are supported with a playful Raymond Scott song.

As Max studies, he looks at the flame of the candle on his desk and is taken back to when he first fell in love with fire. He is shown as a young boy and is immediately taken away by his father to study for the S.I.T. The king forces him to study by bribing him with money. Max's second flashback shows how he tries to use his pyromaniac tendencies to do something nice for his father. He attempts to throw a nice firework show on his father's birthday, but of course the king is not amused. In his final flashback, Max is shown blowing up a mountain of S.I.T. books in an attempt to rebel against his father. He snaps back to reality and the story proceeds as the previous version. Max throws stones at his grandfather, ignites the grass on fire, ironically kills himself, and his father is left with sadness and guilt.

3.1.5 Banana King Is Born

Overall, *The Son of the Monkey King* does not fully succeed in the whimsical and entertaining nature intended. The voice over technique helps in the beginning, but is not necessarily needed, and can be viewed as a crutch for storytelling. When the voice over is omitted, the story falls flat because the conflict is not strong enough for the audience to identify with Max. The use of the original monkey king and *Journey to the West* story concepts are

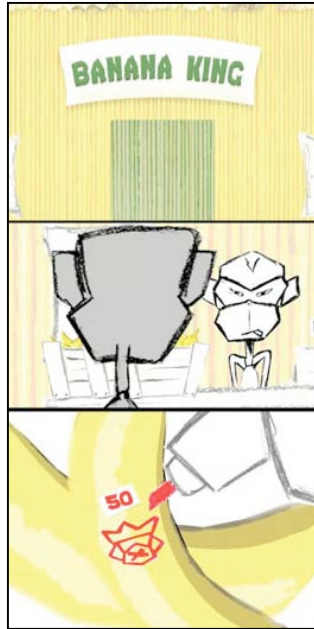


Figure 16: *Banana King* storyboards

forced upon this modern adaptation. At this point in the process there are several important questions to ask: What makes a good short film? What does the character really want? What is the message?

Banana King attempts to answer these questions with a new and different story. Max's motivation in life is to be a famous graffiti artist, but his father constantly reminds him he must adhere to his responsibilities at their family business. Max pours most of his energy into developing unique tags to brand his graffiti-image.

His father sees that this is a distraction and sternly reminds Max he must price and stock bananas. When Max does not obey, his father rips up Max's sketchbook in frustration. Max is simultaneously shocked and infuriated. He reluctantly begins his pricing when he gets an idea to tag the banana. He is so proud of his devious deed that he continues to secretly tag several random bananas throughout the store. Just as he returns to his position behind the counter, his father suspiciously enters. He notices a banana with marker scribbled on it and throws a temper tantrum. In his enraged fit, his father starts throwing bananas around and one boomerangs back and hits him in the face. Max reacts with laughter and tries to hold his giggles. As his father struggles to his feet in embarrassment, a customer enters the store. The customer looks at one of the bananas Max has tagged. A tense moment arises as Max and his father hold their breath, waiting for the customer's reaction. Surprisingly, the customer approaches the counter and buys the tagged banana from Max.

His father stares in shock and slowly admits defeat by walking over to Max and putting his arm around his shoulder. Just as his father shows his approval, several monkeys are heard approaching the store, searching for Max's hip bananas.

The *Banana King* story works well because Max has something that he wants and the conflict between him and his father is fully exposed. Essentially, the conflict is a bit simpler and easier to understand. The disagreement is physically evident as his father rips his sketchbook and destroys his artwork. Max physically mutilates his father's produce by subtly vandalizing bananas.

Banana King endured a couple of iterations, but mostly to cut down on unnecessary story beats. The first iteration included a monkey newspaper and graffiti magazine to communicate Max's success as a produce-tag-graffiti-artist. Max's father again forced him to study for school and tend to his responsibilities at the banana shop. The animatics initially began with sub-titles to translate the "monkey talk", but peer reviews and user testing proved that subtitles were distracting and also unnecessary. (See Appendix D)

3.2 Production

After successfully nailing the story beats, embarking on the animation journey has shown me how much time is involved in making a 3D animated film. Up until this point, I was struggling and learning the best way to tell a humorous story of a tense parent-child relationship. The production

process provided another intense learning experience, which took about four times longer than I expected.

Developing an efficient pipeline and production calendar is extremely important in the 3D production process. However, I did not realize that I would have to continually cycle through certain areas in the pipeline. Each step in the pipeline greatly affects the next and all steps in the process must be taken into consideration from the very beginning. For example, the modeling technique must anticipate how the character geometry will deform in the rigging process and the rigging controls greatly affect the future animation capabilities.

The production pipeline started with modeling in Maya, creating the environment in Vue, importing the environment back into Maya, rendering from Maya, importing into After Effects, rendering from After Effects, importing into Final Cut Studio, and finally rendering from Final Cut Studio.

3.2.1 Modeling + Rigging

Max and his father were created primarily with polygons, using the traditional box-modeling method in Maya. Max was modeled first and his top, front, and side character sketches were brought into Maya on image planes so I could reference his design. I started out simply with a polygon cube and proceeded to move the vertices and extrude faces in order to mold his face and body. I found the *Select Edge Ring*, *Select Edge Loop* and *Insert Edge Loop* tools extremely helpful when adding detail to the character geometry or *mesh*.

The majority of the modeling time was spent on facial structure. Extra detail was required around the eyes and mouth so that I could achieve the types of facial expressions desired. I found exceptional guidance through Gary Oliverio's *Maya 8 Character Modeling* and Jason Osipa's *Stop Staring* manuals. Oliverio's text is a step-by-step process of modeling an entire character's body and face with polygons. He is very specific on where to split polygons, extrude faces, and how to keep the geometry in quadrilaterals (4-sided polygons) for optimal smoothing and deformation. Osipa's is a wonderfully detailed book on just facial expression. Along with tips for how to shape the geometry, he elaborates on the purpose for these techniques so that a character's eyebrows and the surrounding skin will deform properly and believably when animating. He also gives several sections on specific expressions and how features, such as the cheeks, on a character affect a smile or a frown. One common mistake among facial animation is to animate one feature and not take into account the entire facial structure of the character.

After several stages of sculpting Max's face, came one of the most enjoyable parts of the process: *blend shapes*. The blend shape deformer allows you to blend the character's original geometry with duplicated instances of the same geometry. When duplicating the mesh, it is also important to create extra duplicates in case they are needed later in the process. Max has a total of 14 blend shapes, all of which are named properly for organization (see Figure 14).

Figure 17: The Blend Shape animation window in Maya provides sliders for each blend shape, which can be keyframed

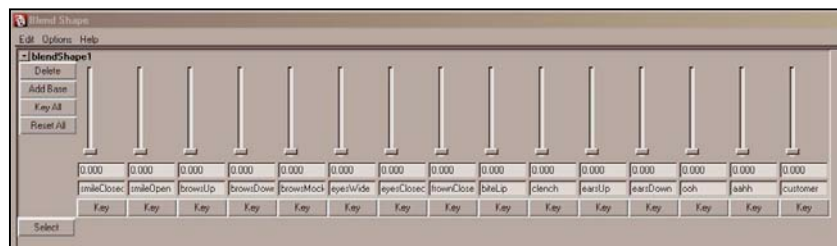


Figure 18: Max's facial expressions created from his blend shapes

Each blend shape is a duplicate of his body, with only the face is altered. Each duplicate is placed in a blendShape node and given a time slider, which can be keyframed and animated. A variety of tools were used to mold his eyebrows up and down and his mouth from a frown to a smile. I made sure to isolate the eyes and mouth when creating the expressions, so that I could later use them in combination with each other for a more dynamic effect. I used a combination of the *Sculpt Geometry Tool*, *Lattice Deformers*, and the *Soft Modification Tool* to create his expressions.

Watching Max's face deform with his blend shapes was one of the most satisfying and entertaining moments for me in this entire process. He instantly came to life and brought the intended humor and whimsy to the story with his guilty eyebrows and sly smile. (See Appendix A)

Max's father's face was modeled separately and I created similar blend shapes for his facial expressions. I used Max's body and slightly modified its features for the father's body.

The rigging process was a stage that hindered production immensely. After Max's facial expressions were complete, I created a skeleton for him, which included all of the finger and toe bones (or joints). When creating a skeleton for a character, it is advisable to use the *X-Ray*

shading mode so that the joints can be placed with accuracy. In this mode, you can view the joints through the transparent mesh. The joints should lie in the middle of the body, arms, and legs so when the mesh is skinned onto the skeleton, the joints have equal weights on each vertex and the process of painting weights will be lessened. In Maya, the *Bind Skin* operation attaches a mesh (polygons, NURBS, etc.) to a skeleton. After a mesh is bound, the bones in the skeleton can be rotated and the mesh will move as if it were attached skin.

After skinning the mesh onto the skeleton, *IK handles* were placed on the joints so that the bones would bend in a realistic manner. IK stands for Inverse Kinematics and the handles allow you to control joint rotations of a skeleton so that an arm does not unrealistically bend backwards or a leg bend upwards. Max has IK's on his neck, spine, arms, hands, fingers, hips, legs, feet, and toes.

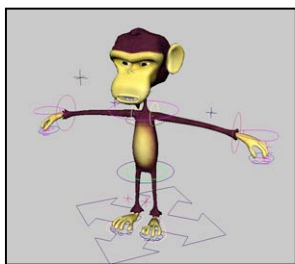


Figure 19: Max's rig with NURBS controllers and locator constraints

Each of the IK handles was then parented to a NURBS shape control so that I could easily grab this shape when animating. However, the hierarchy of these controls was given careful thought. For example, the arm control was a parent for the wrist, hand, and finger controls so that I could select the entire arm to animate, then grab each child wrist or hand control, and individually animate the fingers. Parenting the controls affects how the overall character moves and in this process I learned how I could accentuate Max's personality. Placing a control on his hips added to the comedic nature of the story because the control was animated during his walk cycle and added to his quirky posture. (See Appendix A)

The last step in rigging is painting the weights of a character's mesh. The *Paint Weights Tool* allows you to “paint” the influence of a specific joint on a character's mesh. Once the mesh and tool are selected, within the tool dialogue, a joint is selected. The character mesh will only display values of 0 to 1 (black to white). A black area indicates that the joint has no influence on that area of the mesh, whereas a white area indicates the joint has full influence on that mesh area. Thus, grey areas represent a combination of influences on that particular vertex of the mesh.

The most challenging sections when painting weights, with any character, is the shoulder area. Max is a monkey and consequently his arms swing freely and he is very flexible. The best method is to put the character in an extreme position and smooth out the mesh as it deforms.

Once Max was nearly complete, I duplicated his skeleton and scaled it accordingly for the father. I had to repeat the entire IK handles and controls process because of the difference in scale and thus repeat the weight painting process. In addition to Max's set of controls, his father was given an extra *bend* deformer to control the curvature of his moustache, which can be seen flying up and down in his moments of intense anger.

3.2.2 Lighting + Textures

The lighting in *Banana King* went through two iterations. During pre-visualization, I rendered out still frames for the 3D animatic using two render features in Maya called *Final Gather* and *Physical Sun and Sky*, which

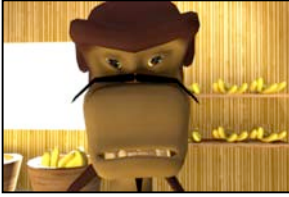


Figure 20: Scene rendered with *Final Gather* and *Physical Sun and Sky*

produces a realistic feel with the lighting and textures. Both features can be found in the *Render Settings* window in Maya. The characters and set exhibited a stop-motion-like feel that I adored and the actual lighting setup and tweaks were minimal. During render tests I discovered that each frame took around five minutes to render, this at merely half of the final resolution. Animation render tests also revealed that Maya needs extra help when rendering *Final Gather* or else undesired “chatter” and static will surface on the rendered frames.

Several scenes in my early pre-visualization animatic show Max or his father walking inside and outside of the shop, but the lighting proved to be problematic and as a result I had to re-think the scenes. The final lighting set up involves a majority of directional lights to simulate the sun, a couple of point lights to accentuate glow on the characters, and area lights to create a bounce or rim light on the edges of the characters.

Without the use of final gather, my textures appeared less tangible and very “CG” looking. Any objects with default *lambert* surfaces looked too simple or fake. A *lambert* surface in Maya is a material shader that represents matte or unpolished surfaces. To give textures a livelier feel, I edited them in Photoshop by multiplying subtle texture layers. For the main monkey characters, I added a fur texture and for the store I added a herringbone texture.

3.2.3 Animation

The majority of the animation involved using the facial blend shapes and upper-body movements. A combination of

blend shapes were used to create particular facial expressions. For Max's guilty expression, after his father discovers the tagged bananas, I animated his eye, eyebrow, mouth, and ear blend shapes. At the same time, I took into account his body movement and posture. The movements are slight, but necessary. Having Max change facial expression without any body movement looks awkward and wrong. Even the slightest animation of his spine or shoulders made the scene that much more believable.

After keyframing a control or expression, I was sure to smooth and ease the motion on Maya's animation *Graph Editor*. This window gives the animator full control over the motion and helps to create seamless and believable movements. It is often helpful to initially flatten the tangents on any animation curve in order to avoid erratic and undesired motion.

When animating walk cycles, I referenced 2-leg and 4-leg cycles from Richard Williams' *The Animator's Survival Kit*. I also watched chimpanzees and practiced physically walking on all four limbs, hands and feet, to get a feel for secondary motion and weight shifting.

3.2.4 Rendering + Compositing

Three render layers were used to aid in compositing control: beauty, ambient occlusion, and depth. The beauty layer contains the objects, lights, and textures and uses the Maya *mental ray* algorithm to *raytrace* the scene. The ambient occlusion layer also uses *mental ray* and *raytracing*, but only contains the object geometry as it provides information related to contact shadows between the objects.



Figure 21: Beauty, ambient occlusion, and depth layer from shot 6

The rendered image looks as if the entire scene was painted in white chalk. Lastly, the depth layer uses the *Maya Software* renderer to output only the objects in the scene as a black or white value. Objects that appear black are further from the camera and objects that appear white are closer.

Every shot in *Banana King* was edited and composited in After Effects with these three layers. The beauty layer was modified with a bloom or glow effect to simulate fuzzy sunlight. The ambient occlusion layer was multiplied over the beauty layer to give the scene a realistic and tangible quality. With this layer, I was able to achieve an effect similar to what *Final Gather* initially produced. The depth layer was used as a luma matte above an adjustment layer that had a blur effect applied. This technique allows the black and white depth image to blur according to its 0 to 1 value. Closer components in the scene appear white and thus appear less blurred, while objects in the scene that appear black will become more blurred to fake the perception of depth.

After the Maya renders were edited and composited in After Effects, I modified the final shots with a subtle grain and vignette to mimic real film. As mentioned before, the renders appeared too “CG” and adding a bit of imperfection and grime adds character to the look of the animation as well as the story.

3.2.5 Editing + Sound

The rendered shots from After Effects were brought into Final Cut Studio to edit with the monkey vocals, sound effects, and theme music. The animated monkey mouths

were matched with a library of monkey voice over, provided by three different actors. Max's voice came solely from Kari Gaynor and Max's father is a combination of Andrew Sheppard and Kai Chapman. When directing the actors, I gave them the dialogue they were "speaking" in English words and it was up to them to translate those words into their own monkey interpretation.

Jay Rothman provided his musical talent in creating "Monkey Pox", the theme for *Banana King*. I gave him several songs from my references of Chinese songs, *Booker T. & The MG's*, *Django Reinhardt*, and *Gorillaz*. "Monkey Pox" begins when Max tags his first banana and continues as he mischievously vandalizes bananas around the store. The music stops abruptly to signal the father's entrance and continues once again towards the end of the story when the customer buys a banana and Max's father shows his approval.

The final piece is rendered at HD resolution, 1280 pixels by 720 pixels and a 16:9 ratio.

Chapter 4: Evaluation

4.1 Story

The most important aspect of this project for me, was communicating the conflicting story through humor. The first semester helped me realize why most people consider comedy harder than drama. One initial mistake I made was trying to tackle the entire subject matter as a whole, when I should have focused on the main character. It was not until about the fourth iteration of *The Son of the Monkey King* that I finally gave Max a clear desire. Then it was not until *Banana King* that I made a clear and concise conflict between him and his father.

I expected the story beats to help me portray the narrative in its comedic intent, but I think the monkey voice over was initially overlooked as an integral part of the piece. Through peer reviews and final critiques, I have received much praise on the use of the monkey voices and the choice to make the dialogue grunts, woops, and screams instead of actual words. These amusing sounds help communicate the anger between the characters and entertain the audience.

4.2 3D Computer Animation

When I approached the second semester, my 3D development was minimal and I believe I have endured an extremely difficult and long journey since the beginning of the semester. The following technological problems forced me to cut absolutely unnecessary parts of the story because of lack of time:

- rigging the characters

- lighting both inside and outside sets
- texturing the characters and set

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, I constantly cycled between steps in my pipeline. I would skin Max, add his IK handles, and then add his controls. When I went to animate, I realized his body was not moving the way I wanted it to and I had to go back and manually fix the IK handles and then think of a better way to parent my controls for optimal control. Or upon animation, I realized his weight painting was not smooth enough and would have to repeat and refine that process. Other times, the controls performed erratically and I had to be sure that I selected the NURBs control in Maya and performed *Delete History* and *Freeze Transformations*. Both of these operations clear out any history on the object and bring the translate, rotate, and scale features back to 0.

The direction, rotation, intensity, and shadow features of each light were individually tweaked to achieve the final lighting set up. I would often sit for hours and change one aspect of the light, render, change, render, change and so forth. The preview renders were crucial and took longer than expected, but this time was indeed necessary to achieving the look of *Banana King*.

The concept of UV texturing was almost foreign to me when entering this project. Having to unfold and sew the UVs of Max and his father proved to be similar to modeling the characters! Maya offers an *Automatic UV Mapping* feature, however it is always advised to sculpt the UVs manually so that the texture is wrapped accurately around the model. I actually exported the mesh of the characters from Maya in

OBJ format and imported into a program named Roadkill. Roadkill provided an easier and more intuitive process when breaking the UV edges or vertices and sewing them together. After the UVs were set in Roadkill, I exported and re-imported the mesh into Maya. Then I took a UV snapshot and brought this into Photoshop to further texture.

One extremely important component, to any project, is organization. Within Maya, I had to make sure all of my joints, controls, blend shapes, geometry, and scene files were all named accordingly in order to make the production as speedy as possible. Leaving default labels only confuses things in the process so it is vital to take the time to organize and name things appropriately.

4.3 Editing + Compositing

As I watch the cinematography of *Banana King*, I realize many of my decisions were based on my time constraints. Many of the shots are close or medium shots, which contributes to the small size of the shop, but sometimes confuses the viewer as to what action is taking place. Producing and directing a 3D film is just as difficult and involves the same exact principles as a live action film. Creating shots that are continuously confusing does not help the story communicate well, no matter how solid the story beats are. After the final critique, I went through my shots and re-rendered several where I pulled out from the scene or re-timed the action to appear less confusing. The criticism at the final was less on the look of the piece and more on understanding the story.

I truly wish I had more time to spend on compositing. The power of render layers from Maya into a compositing program like After Effects gives the user complete control over color, lighting, and mood. I knew I wanted *Banana King* to appear film-like and I added a vignette and grain to achieve this look. After user reviews and critiques, it was advised that I tone down the effects. In this process, I discovered other plug-ins and ended up re-editing all of my shots with the new filters.

4.4 The Future of Banana King

The most prevalent reaction to the *Banana King* story is that it shall continue as a series where every episode Max is up to his normal mischief and his father has to pick up the pieces. The message in *Banana King* is to teach parents that sometimes their kids can make their own decisions, which may ultimately be correct.

Banana King will see many animation and film festivals and hopefully serve as a pitch for an upcoming quarrel between two hysterical monkeys.

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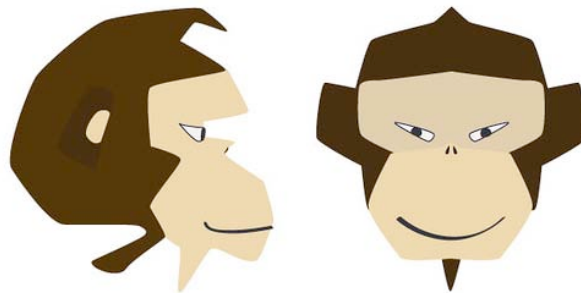
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APPENDIX A

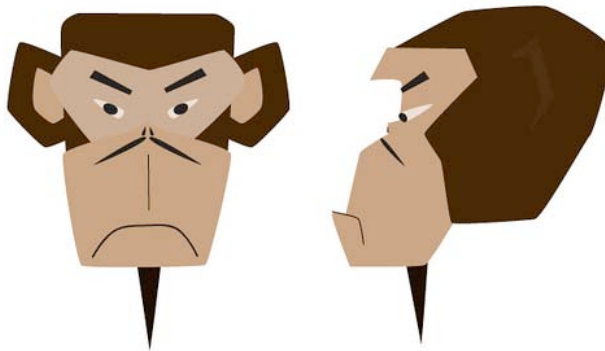
Character Bible

Max



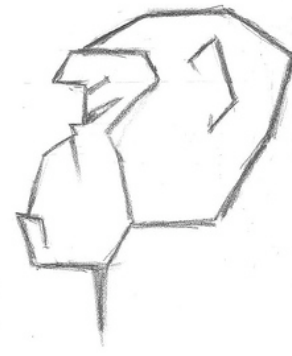
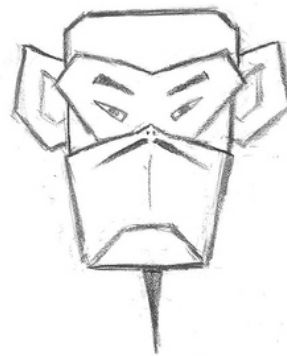
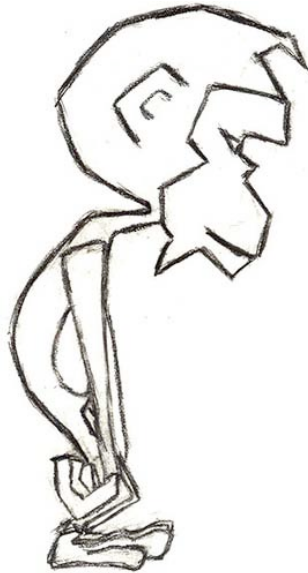
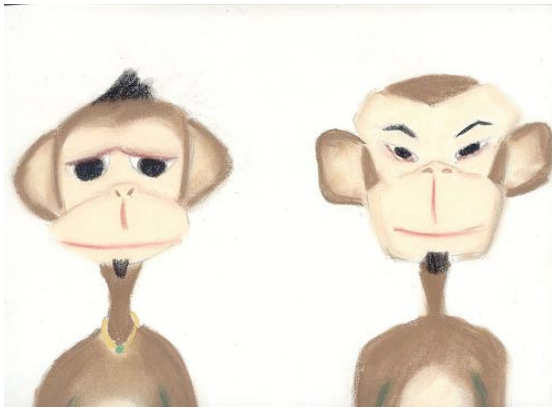
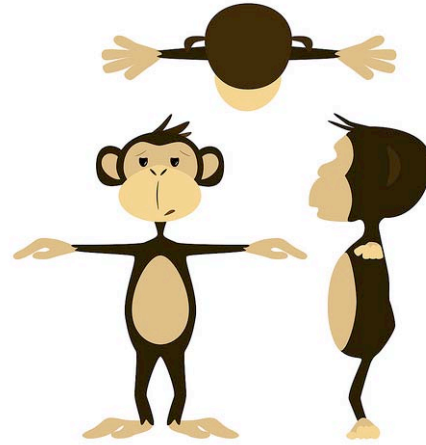
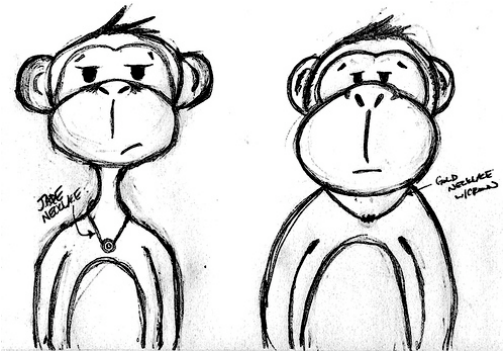
Max is an aspiring graffiti artist who lives under the strict figure of his domineering father. He spends most of his days painting a colorful, urban-style cityscape--a grave contrast to his home in the tranquil jungle. He loves the vibrant colors and adventurous lines that characterize graffiti art. Unfortunately, his father always shatters his vision by distracting him with mindless tasks at their family banana shop, Banana King. The white uniform apron he is required to wear is covered in paint smudges, as is the rest of his body, down to his hands, feet, fingers, and toes. He hates that his father does not appreciate his love and talent for urban art and secretly wishes his father showed some interest in his passion. Max is practical in the sense that he understands that his father loves him, but thinks he is stubborn and narrow-minded for not attempting to see the appeal in design or art.

Father



Max's father is a stubborn, strict, simpleton. He believes in tradition and dedication to family, thus expects Max to be dedicated to Banana King. His main concern is keeping their family banana shop fully stocked so they can make a good living and finding ways to make their shop more profitable. The better bananas they put out, the more money they will make. He knows Max is smart and believes Max is capable of taking over the family business when his father can no longer maintain all of the responsibilities himself. However, he knows that Max's interest in graffiti is distracting his attention to the banana shop, where it belongs. He doesn't see how producing art will benefit Max in the future. He considers it impractical and unprofitable. In order to have a successful future, Max must set his goals to ensure he will make enough money to support himself and his family.

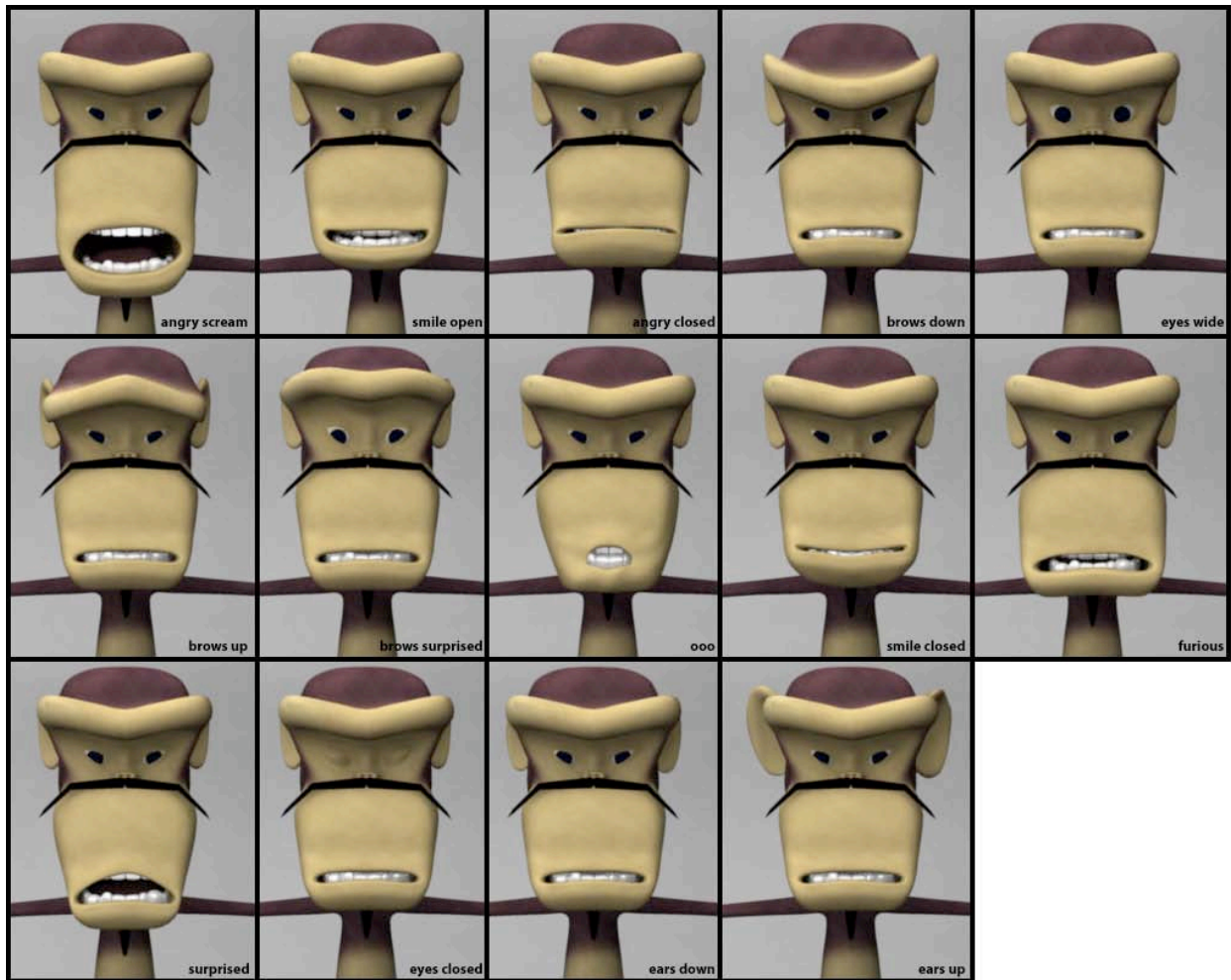
Character Designs & Original Sketches



Blend Shape Expressions for Max



Blend Shape Expressions for Father



APPENDIX B

Set Design

Early Bamboo Hut Sketches



Final Set Design Renders



APPENDIX C

Scripts

BANANA KING

by
Nettie Tien

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE (BEHIND BANANA SHOP) – SUNNY DAY

Max paints a vibrant cityscape using a large stone as his canvas. He uses a step stool to reach higher parts on his mural, using spray paint bottles that are held in his apron.

INT. BANANA SHOP

Max's father brings boxes of bananas into the banana shop and places them on the front counter for Max to price and stock.

EXT. JUNGLE (BEHIND BANANA SHOP) – SUNNY DAY

FATHER
Ah-hem!

Max's father stands, arms crossed, in the back doorway of the banana shop. Max's ears shake as he hears his father's grunt. He takes the paint bottles out of his apron and places them on the step stool. Max's white "Banana King" apron is full of colorful paint smudges.

He stomps past his father in anger. His father stops him to look at his apron. He shakes his head in disappointment.

INT. BANANA SHOP

Max grumbles to himself and fidgets at the register counter. His father tells him to price and stock the new shipment of bananas.

MAX
(sigh)

Max begrudgingly obeys his father and starts to price the bananas. He looks out the window at his mural and stares. His father immediately runs over to pull down the shade to the window. Max angrily turns around and continues pricing.

THE NEXT DAY**INT. BANANA SHOP**

Max stands behind the counter reading a magazine and eating a banana. Several boxes of bananas sit on the counter, waiting to be stocked. Max's interest is held by "Graffunky", his father's graffiti art magazine.

Max's father enters the store and looks at Max.

FATHER
Ah-hem!

Max looks up at his father. His father picks up a banana and starts shaking it frantically in the air.

FATHER
(in monkey talk)
Why aren't you stocking these bananas!?
There is work to be done! These are
the best bananas we've ever been shipped!
They need to be out immediately!

Max's father throws a banana in anger, and it boomerangs back to hit him in the head. His father falls to the ground.

MAX
Haha!

Max bites his lip, trying not to laugh at his father. His father forcefully grabs onto the corner of the counter to pull himself up. While doing so he clutches onto the "Graffunky" magazine and starts to crumble it in his palm. He snatches it from the counter and rips it into pieces.

Max stares back in anger and astonishment.

FATHER
(in monkey talk)
Stock these bananas now!
You need to know our
inventory to help run and improve
our family business!

Max begins to price the bananas forcefully and angrily. His father, still fuming, runs outside to paint over Max's mural. Max lividly peers out the window. He looks at the banana he is pricing and squeezes it in anger. The inside pops out and he drops the peel on the floor. He grabs another banana and holds it up. He pulls out a paint marker and tags the banana with his little monkey king "tag".

Max giggles to himself and begins to tag the rest of the bananas in the box and store. Customers begin to file into the store and buy the tagged bananas.

A WEEK LATER

INT. BANANA SHOP

Max and his father open the store and Max assumes his position behind the counter. He hears the mail drop on the front door. He walks to the door and sees a newspaper and his "Graffunky" magazine. Max smiles as he reads the newspaper heading "THE BEST BANANAS AROUND! BANANA KING RULES!" He looks at the front of "Graffunky" in shock. "THE LATEST FAD: PRODUCE TAG" Max's tagged bananas are on the front of his favorite magazine.

Max's father begins organizing bananas. He notices something on one and begins to examine the monkey king tag. He looks at Max's marker behind his ear and grows angry.

FATHER

(in monkey talk)

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!? DID YOU DO THIS!?

WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!?

Max hears his father from behind. He hides his magazine in his armpit and turns around thrusting the newspaper in his father's face. His father pauses to read the newspaper. His expression changes from anger to joy.

FATHER

(in monkey talk)

HAHA! DO YOU SEE THIS!?

WE'RE RICH! WE'RE RICH! HAHAAAA!

Max father clutches the newspaper to his chest. He turns around to read the newspaper and walks back towards the counter.

Max turns his back to his father and opens up "Graffunky". His father happily skips away in the background while reading the newspaper. He accidentally slips on a banana peel.

FADE OUT.

THE END

THE SON OF THE MONKEY KING
(Iterations II & III)
by
Nettie Tien

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE SCENE — SUNNY DAY

Max sits at his stone desk with an SIT manual open. The sun shines brightly behind him creating a spotlight surrounding him.

ZAP

An apple falls to the ground at Max's feet. Max sighs in frustration.

ZAP

A banana falls to the ground, next to the apple. He sighs and begins to quickly tap his foot on the ground.

ZAP ZAP ZAP

More bananas fall to the ground. Max grumbles and slams his head on his SIT manual.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
This (pause) is Max.

Max looks up at the camera, flustered, frowning, exhausted, disappointed. He stands up, angry, and shaking with a stone in hand. He grinds his teeth and looks towards a large stone on the ground next to him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Since the day of his birth, he has been studying diligently for his upcoming SIT, the Scholastic Immortality Test.

Max prepares to throw the stone fiercely, but his father appears to check on his studying. Max smiles (mid throw) and drops the stone. His father looks serious and stern. His eyes travel to the SIT manual.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
As son of the legendary Chinese Monkey King, Max is required to take the SIT on his 18th birthday.

Max scurries back to his desk and picks up his SIT manual. The camera focuses on the table of contents with different tasks

to study for the exam.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Through the years, he has learned
how to swiftly soar through the
clouds.

EXT. HIGH IN THE SKY WITH MOUNTAINS AND CLOUDS (FLASHBACK)

Max flies through the clouds, he looks determined and serious.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. JUNGLE SCENE – SUNNY DAY

Camera on TOC of manual, focusing on KUNG FU chapter.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He has mastered the fighting skills
to quickly and cleverly defeat his
opponents in battle.

EXT. JUNGLE SCENE (FLASHBACK)

Max defeats four opponents at once, with his limbs flying in
every direction. A large dust cloud fades away to reveal Max in
a Kung Fu position.

MAX

WOOOOHHHHH-HIIIIYAAHHHHHHA!!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. JUNGLE SCENE – SUNNY DAY

Cut back to Max sitting at his desk with manual. He looks bored,
with his head resting on his hand.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

However, Max does not see the
purpose in being an immortal monkey.
He fears endless years will bore
him. On the other hand, he seeks his
father's acceptance and approval.
Unfortunately, Max cannot master
this last magical task. The

NARRATOR (V.O. CONT'D)

Body Out of Body Transformation. He must change one of his hairs into a clone of himself.

Max attempts to perform the trick and the hair turns into a banana. He throws a pebble at the large stone next to him. It ricochets off and hits his necklace.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Max often seeks guidance and confides in his grandfather stone. The heavenly stone that gave birth to his father.

Max screams at the large stone, throwing more pebbles at it. His father stands behind him motionless. Max turns around and smiles. He runs back to his desk once again. His father slowly leaves, with his nose in the air. Max smacks his head on the desk and pounds his fists. He finds a large rock and throws it as hard as he can at his grandfather stone. A spark ensues and immediately the stone and nearby grass catch on fire.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Alas, the stone gave Max a clue to master the transformation...

Max turns around in shock. He stares at the fire. It does not grow any larger. He looks at the stone. His eyebrows rise. He pulls a hair out of his head.

ZAP *POOF*

NARRATOR (V.O.)

FIRE!

The hair ignites into a little ball of fire and transforms into a miniature version of Max. Max's eyes explode in joy. He claps vigorously with all four limbs as he rolls on the ground.

NEXT DAY

EXT. MOUNTAIN OF FRUIT AND FLOWERS – SIT EXAM SITE

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The next day Max arrives at the Mountain of Fruit & Flowers for his Scholastic Immortality Test.

Max trembles as he looks from his father to each SIT official. His father nods in acknowledgment. An official nods quickly at Max and looks down at the sign he is holding. It reads "BODY OUTSIDE OF BODY TRANSFORMATION".

Max smiles at his father. In his excitement he pulls out a fistful of hairs and tosses them in the air. They ignite. His father and the exam officials look at the fire in fear.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Although Max discovered the secret to this transformation, he overestimated his newfound ability.

KABOOM

The fire bursts into large flames and burns Max to death. Only his ashes and necklace remain. His father looks at the pile in disappointment. The officials clean up his ashes and give his urn to the King.

EXT. MOUNTAIN OF FRUIT AND FLOWERS – SIT EXAM SITE

The King approaches the holy temple with Max's urn.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

To this day, the King has not had a single child pass the SIT.

The King places Max's urn on a shelf. The camera zooms out to reveal many urns within the temple. All of past children of the king who had died in an attempt to pass the SIT.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Even I didn't make it. Indeed, Max reached his SIT examination day. Many of us did not. Maybe the next child will pass the test.

FADE OUT.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Maybe not.

THE END

Voice Over Script – The Son of the Monkey King (Iteration I)

The Monkey King is a legendary figure in Chinese folklore. He exudes magical power, respect and strength. It was his determination, diligence and intellect that led him to achieve his status of immortality. He learned how to fly quickly through the clouds, cleverly outwit his opponents in battle and transform hairs from his own body into an object or even a clone of himself.

Max is the son of the Monkey King, who's 18th birthday approaches. As decided by his father and accepted by the gods, on his 18th birthday he is to take the Scholastic Immortality Test in order to demonstrate all that his father embodies.

Max has been slowly studying since the age of 10. And has managed to somewhat successfully demonstrate his flying and fighting skills. Today he is trying to master the Body Outside Body Transformation. Unfortunately, he has been having problems and cannot turn his hairs into monkeys. His gluttonous confidant, Hank, benefits from his errors.

Failure is indeed frustrating, he does not want to disappoint his father, but his scores are less than stellar. Why is he doing this? He does not want to be immortal. An infinite amount of years will bore him. Max rather enjoys his life when he is not studying for the SIT. The mountains, the trees, the flowers, the beauty. All of this may bore him after he has grown old. What will be left to enjoy if he is to live forever?

Hank reminds him that once he passes the SIT, his life will be less stressful. And it is better to live forever. And it's OK to make mistakes now, especially when they're so delicious.

Max reluctantly agrees because he longs for his father's approval. And knows that this will indeed make his father proud, to have an immortal son. He also thinks about how his father has no idea that he has no interest in obtaining immortality. And how his mother left because she did not want to raise Max as immortal, since she was immortal herself. What would it be like if he were raised by her? What does it matter? She lives in a distant land.

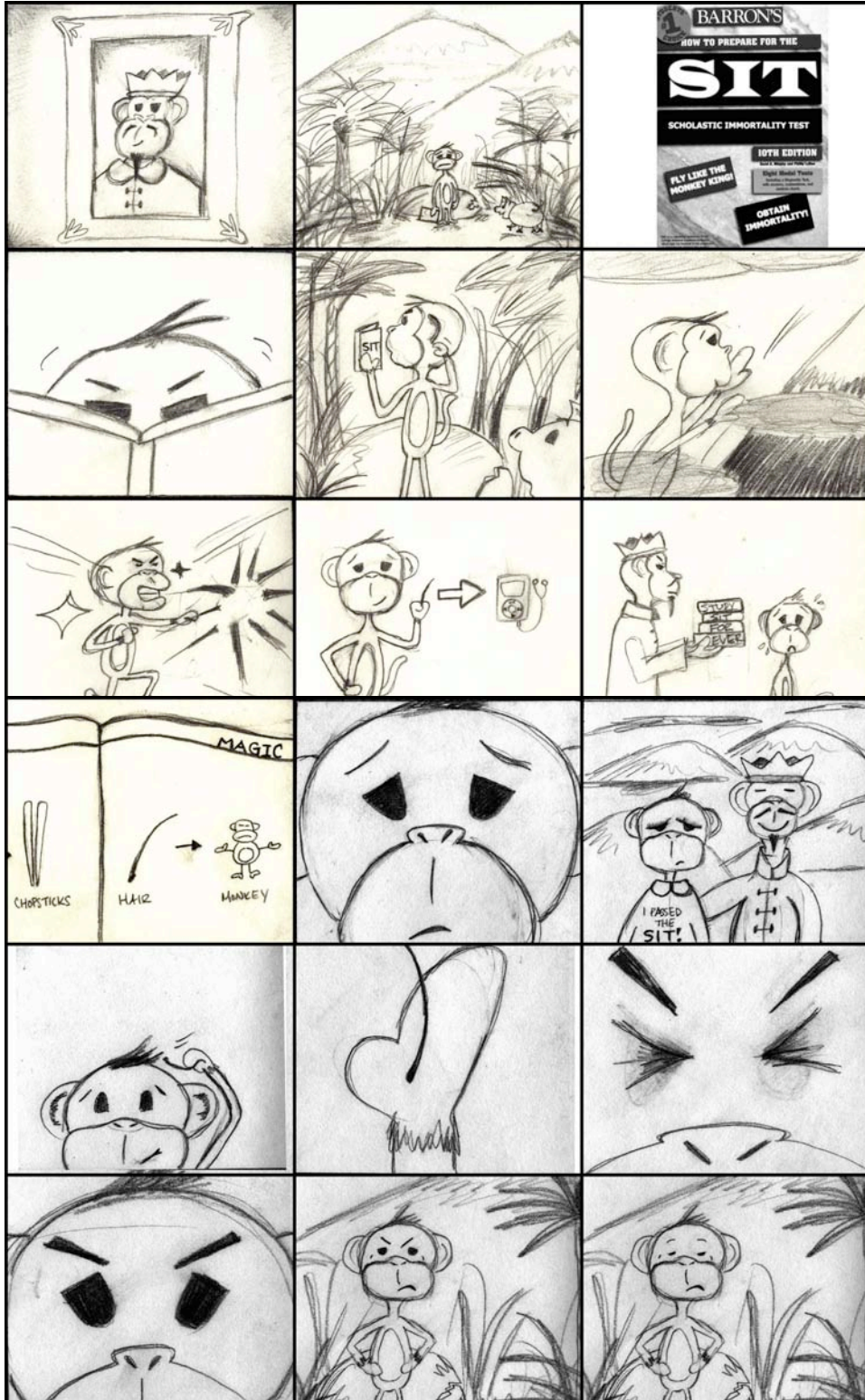
Max tried his magic again and failed.

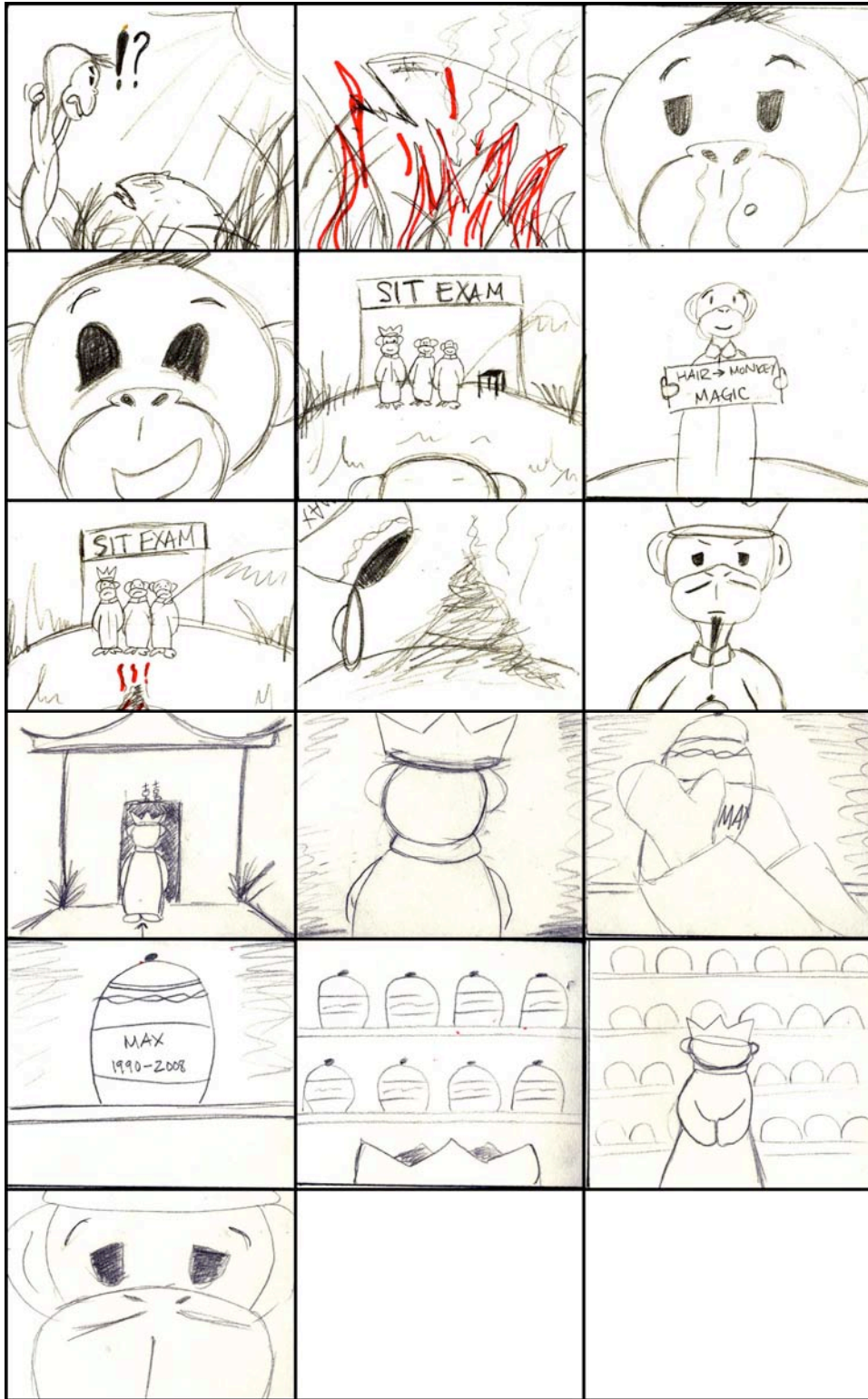
The next morning Max was nowhere to be found. Hank brought a note to the King from his son. Max said he had no desire to be immortal ever and he went to find his mother. The Monkey King was extremely sad and realized that he had pushed all of his loved ones away.

APPENDIX D

Storyboards

The Son of the Monkey King Storyboards (Iterations II & III)





Banana King Storyboards



