Campbell & The Cryptid: Mindfulness and Mediality

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CAMPBELL & THE CRYPTID: MINDFULNESS AND MEDIALITY

by

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BFA University of Florida 2021

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2024

Major Professor: Jo Anne Adams
ABSTRACT

_Campbell & The Cryptid_ is a short film that intertwines the bittersweet intensity of imagination with the nostalgic medium of hand drawn two-dimensional animation. Campbell is an eleven-year-old girl who loves adventure and spending time with her brother. But when he moves away, she carries on her explorations on her own. This leads her to discover a strange friend in the woods. The experience helps her understand that the unknown is not always as bad as imagined. Influences on the artistic direction include irreverent media such as _Calvin & Hobbes_, as well as more speculative works such as _Over the Garden Wall_ to establish both the charm of youth and the authenticity of introspection.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people that have supported me in the journey through graduate school and I am grateful for the holistic growth it fostered.

This film was largely shaped by the wisdom and dedication of the faculty in the Emerging Media: Animation and Visual Effects program: Jo Anne, K-J, Christina, Stella, Cheryl, Demetrius, and Darlene. Your lessons will continue to guide my practice throughout my career.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow classmates in the Animation and Visual Effects program, as they have imbued joy, love, and grace into my workflow over the past three years. My cohort, Tiffany, Maddie, and Kevaun, will be my lifelong friends.

Additionally, I must mention my family not only because been perpetually immensely supportive, but they also directly inspired the events and themes of my film.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

_Campbell & The Cryptid_ is a semi-autobiographical animation that examines the subject of coping with change through a lens of mindfulness in separating the imagination from reality. The message of the film is delivered primarily through metaphor through a setting that is heavily reflective of Campbell’s mindscape. Animation, as an art form, is an extremely flexible medium in terms of visual language, limited only by the mind behind its production. The relationship between cognition and animation is closely linked in that both are highly selective, visuo-spatial processes. For this reason, 2D animation was selected to capture the ephemeral experience of development through change. The hand-drawn quality of _Campbell & The Cryptid_ emerges from this fundamental relationship between animation and cognitive function, serving to disassociate the audience from literalism and instead emphasize the emotional implications of the story.

While many characteristics of the film are heavily derived from my personal memories, the narrative and visual language of the film are rooted in the shared experience within the process of growing up, particularly in the early 2000s. The prevalence of analog media and play at the time, particularly in comics, coloring books, and the uncurated hand of a child without expectations engendered by internet exposure, is referenced throughout the film. This reflection of the past contributes to the overarching theme of coping with change on a grander scale, beyond the two and a half minute events of the film. Campbell’s confrontation with change is only one instance in the long series of self reflection that results in identity and adulthood. The ongoing cycle of change and confrontation is celebrated through references to analog media, a form of technology that has evolved just as childhood evolves into maturity.
CHAPTER TWO: HOW FORM INFORMS CONTENT

The Story of Overcoming the Monster

While the story structure initially reflects Christopher Booker’s overcoming the monster archetype, in which a character’s purpose is to destroy an evil, Campbell & The Cryptid is a subversion of the traditional western monster (Booker 33). The protagonist, Campbell, begins in the comfort of her home. Missing her brother, she decides to undertake a journey into the forest to quell her longing for adventure. The swampy setting becomes increasingly foreboding, as indicated by cool, dark color palettes and rugged foliage. In the depths of the wood, Campbell’s headlamp reveals a strange figure. Humanoid, but deviant in its tiny frame, skeleton mask, and ominous cloak, the cryptid’s character design is meant to signify its role as the story’s “monster” (Booker 32). Much like traditional monsters within this story archetype, Campbell discovers the cryptid lurking in the darkest reaches of the woods. Campbell reacts immediately with fear, running away in a comically terrified manner while the cryptid chases after her. Similarly, the audience will experience reservations about the cryptid, assuming nefarious intentions of the creature due to its ominous presence. A natural fear of the unknown combined with the conditioned expectations of story archetypes leads the audience to make initial judgments about the creature as the villain of the story. However, it is later revealed to be a friendly entity when it returns Campbell’s lost plushie.

Following this development, an innate fear of the unknown is understood to be the true antagonist that must be overcome within the story. Rather than rely on the literal structure of Booker’s story archetype, in which the monster of the story will always be contained within the confines of disbelief, the realistic feeling of uncertainty is embodied in the character’s mentality. There is no monster that is bad due to egocentrism, power, or malice, but there is instead a
perception that directs both the character and the audience to be initially untrusting of the cryptid (Booker 33). Consequently, resolution does not emerge from the hero’s vengeance, but instead Campbell’s acceptance and growth that results from her interaction with her fears. In this narrative, the unknown is revealed to be friendly as a relief to anxiety so that the act of confrontation is rewarded. Campbell chose to seek out the cryptid in the woods both to satisfy her natural curiosity and as relief from the discomfort of her loneliness.

Setting

The limited medium of the short film requires expedited routes of representing much deeper context than can be explained in a matter of minutes. Beyond deliberate and detailed set dressing, Ellen Pifer’s concept of the emotional landscape informed my decision to manifest noncorporeal themes through the setting of the film. In her analysis of the later works of famous writer Anton Chekhov, she explains that the “story’s setting already displays the dual nature which allows the reader to discover for himself the inherent meanings that lie beneath the unobtrusive design of the surface” (Pifer 274-275). Similarly, in my own short form work, I developed a psychological metaphor through choices of color, props, and location. Therefore, the environment elaborates on backstory, captures Campbell’s personality, and functions as a metaphor for her mindscape.

*Campbell & The Cryptid* is very heavily based on my childhood neighborhood in Gainesville, Florida, with a few creative liberties in flora and color scheme. The foliage here is composed of oak, cypress, and pine trees, embellished by Spanish moss, resurrection fern, and climbing ivy. The habitat is not completely untamed, however, as Campbell’s suburban home borders the forest. Because of this familiarity, the forest becomes less of a threatening place. Much like in the comic series *Calvin and Hobbes*, a primary source of inspiration for the film,
the outdoors is presented as a place of imagination and the setting of a coming of age. Therefore, while the forest is uncertain and a common choice for a ‘scary’ setting, it also represents the excitement and whimsy that comes with unfamiliar terrain. This harkens back to the duality of fear and excitement that comes with experiencing change. Additionally, there is a play on “growth” being found in a forest: in the literal sense this would refer to the life in its ecosystem, but in this case it is also referring to self growth.

Figure 1 Forest background from montage scene in Campbell & The Cryptid

The secondary setting of the film, Campbell's bedroom, is a manifestation of her personality. It contains several clues pertaining to the subplot of the bond she shared with her brother as well as their evolving relationship. The space is cluttered by notes, drawings, and sci-fi paraphernalia, reflective of her mental condition as it becomes crowded by worries of change. In later scenes, we return to her bedroom after she has cleared her desk, and thus her mind, and is reflecting on her adventure in the form of a letter. In both instances, it is a comfortable and well lived in space, drenched in warm afternoon light as it appears in the film. The distinctive color scheme between cool teals and soft, warm oranges builds the setting around two disparate states of mind: one of familiarity, and one of the unknown.
Figure 2 Background depicting Campbell’s bedroom

**Color Script**

Color plays a large role in moving the narrative through its emotional arcs. The film is almost entirely depicted in yellow, orange, blue, and green. Beginning in the yellow and orange hues, the golden hour look captures a feeling of warmth, comfort, and accessibility. For this reason, warm, light hues signify familiarity within the film. While the literal implication is that there is enough light to see and understand the surrounding space, there is also an unnatural lilt to the afternoon lighting scheme to signify that these colors are a product of Campbell’s perspective of the world. Additionally, familiarity does not equal comfort. The light cast upon Campbell’s bedroom shows clearly the cluttered state of her mind and the small desk area into which she pours her many thoughts. With her decision to leave this familiar state of unrest, the color scheme of the film immediately introduces dark, cool hues of blue and green to personify the
forest. These hues fluctuate slightly per shot to break the realism of a truly darkened forest. The more uncertain Campbell becomes, the less light is available to her to guide her decisions. She must use only her headlamp, a symbol of her personal judgement and insight, to navigate the forest. Despite the seemingly threatening state of the darkness, however, and the fear of the unknown she experiences, the mystery of the forest proves to be a relief from the discomfort of her well-lit home. In this way, color drives the theme that just as familiarity does not equate comfort, undetermined change is not inherently adverse.

![Figure 3 Color script change over time](image)

**Character Design**

The first iterations of Campbell’s character represent her in a more mature form. She began as a young adult, around the age of twenty. During this period of visual development, the film’s story and motifs captured much more abstract and undefined forms of anxiety. However,
after exploring the storyboards, characters, and other visual elements that would define this theme, I decided to explore facing change as a child rather than the generalized emotional distress of being an adult. This was largely due to my desire to reflect on a past experience in a way that I, and my audience, might be able to apply the revelations of a child to a more current state of mind.

Campbell is both a curious and an intellectual child with a love for science, exploration, and childlike methods of research, but less in tune with emotional matters. In many ways, she is representative of my own eleven-year-old self. For this reason, much of her physicality is based on the activities that I occupied myself with at that age. Campbell’s design reflects both her capacity to sit at a desk and draw for hours as well as venture into the forest behind her house and disappear for the rest of the afternoon. Thus, I gave her chunky arms and skinny legs. Chunkiness has often been used to symbolize an age between childhood and teenagehood, where “baby fat” lingers and the interest in boyfriends or girlfriends has not developed. Examples of the chunky character sensibility include Steven from *Steven Universe* and Mei Lee from *Turning Red*. Simultaneously, her nimble legs give the sense that she likes to walk and run and be on her feet. The overall interplay between a thick and thin build creates a charmingly awkward silhouette. Her top heavy build is representative of her preadolescent age and personality.
The Cryptid is based on the idea of the unknown and the trepidation that may be induced by a lack of familiarity. The creature itself is not necessarily fearful. It does not have predatory or gruesome features of massive, sharp teeth, or piercing eyes. Rather, it is uncertain, as established by traditionally cute proportions against the creepy features of a cloak and skull. The
cryptid had much less direct inspiration from my personal experiences but was instead composed as an allegory for fear. I used a fantasy-esque approach to its design and behavior to suggest that it may be a figment of the imagination, thus posing the question: to what degree are our fears mental constructs? In the earlier stages of production, when I was exploring a mature version of Campbell, the cryptid was much larger and more threatening such as to emphasize the fear that can truly emerge from anxiety. This iteration utilized the smaller version of the cryptid as a sort of lure that introduced the protagonist to the larger cryptid. However, when I shifted my protagonist away from her matured state and into a younger child, I also discarded the larger cryptid such as to balance the two characters’ emotional impacts. The cryptid’s role is mystery and mischief rather than outright terror.

*Figure 6 Initial iteration of cryptid turnaround*
While art is a universal language, most pieces possess a visual language of their own. A vast range of voices are especially present in the realm of animation. *Regular Show*, for example, speaks a distinct language from *Over the Garden Wall*, despite both being 2D animated television shows produced by Cartoon Network. *Regular Show* is characterized by highly simplistic backgrounds that contrast with their wild plot lines to elevate the bizarre comedic tone of the show (Quintel). *Over the Garden Wall*, conversely, is known for detail-indulgent, rich background work that elevates the mysterious ambience present in the show’s plot (McHale). Despite other visual similarities of the two productions, we as viewers would be able to identify to which series an out of context still frame belonged. Strong visual language reinforces theme, attitude, and a personal attachment to the story being told.

The visual language of *Campbell & The Cryptid* is recognizable through heavy contours, illustrative backgrounds, and textural brushwork that creates an unrefined aesthetic. Each of these qualities can be found in storybooks, comic books, and other sequential hand drawn media,
which are often affiliated with the earlier stages of human development, before a concern for perfection arises. Additionally, throughout art history, major movements have provided the groundwork for loose brushwork and personal touch to take precedence over realism. These predecessors informed my visual language to be implicated of a perceptual, youthful experience rather than a literal depiction of Campbell’s adventure from an observatory perspective. While historically these aesthetics have been defined by analog media, my film was developed almost entirely digitally. The purpose of this was twofold. First, to fulfill my personal practice in learning the professional 2D animation pipeline. Secondly, as an experiment in incorporating nostalgia and tangibility into contemporary media practices. While media type often informs aesthetic style, and some styles become lost as technology evolves, *Campbell & The Cryptid* serves as a method to preserve the charm of analog styles into the digital age.

*Figure 8 Campbell's house as it appears in the film, using a painterly style*
Furthermore, the painterly, unkempt application of color and line reinforce Campbell’s adventurous and spunky personality, painting the world in her eyes. Perfection does not equate to tidiness, but instead textural dynamism and unexpected color interaction. Even as she ventures into the dim reaches of the forest, there is a sense of her inquisitive outlook because the style is maintained. Maintaining Campbell’s temperament as an underlying note among the emotional range of the story also orients the reader to experience Campbell’s headspace rather than feelings of dread in the face of adversity. Just as Campbell faces the unknown with prowess, though also a dash of hesitation, the audience may reflect on ways they might approach their own uncertainties with an open mind.

**Animation**

The majority of the animation in *Campbell & the Cryptid* is hand drawn and two dimensional. Though there is a gentle interplay with 3D and interpolated formats, the final composites are a series of flat drawings. Campbell’s movement quality is animated on varying frame counts, most often held for two or three frames. This method of animating deviates from perfect fluidity of motion, as is often seen in automated animation. Limited animation is another layer of the hand-made qualities that defines the film’s visual language, reminding the audience that each frame has been created by a human. Furthermore, Campbell’s discordant movements reflect her awkward, energetic personality. Nonfluid animation establishes Campbell’s quirky mannerisms in order to make her more convincing as a character.

Additionally, animation served a major role in communicating the metaphor of the film’s narrative. The clean linework of the animation becomes scattered and agitated when the characters experience a strong emotion, like fear or surprise. *The Cow* by Aleksandr Petrov played a large part in approaching animation as a tool for breaking reality and entering the mind.
of the character. *The Cow* is a tale about a boy experiencing the loss of the family cow, but because of the expressive quality of Petrov’s style and technique, the boy’s emotional state is articulated with as much impact as the events of the plot. Petrov unites animation and painting intuitively, both being artistic media full of vitality and empathy, in order to bring his character to life through his thoughtful depiction of feelings. The emotional state of the characters presents not only through their facial expressions, but Petrov also warps and fantasizes reality within the film to reflect a greater magnitude of how feelings affect reality. My own film also recreates emotional states as planes of existence outside of the character. Feelings are not simply presented as internalized, but as a temporal state of existence for the characters. Using traditional stylization to communicate the working emotional states within the film furthers my exploration of cognitive animation, representing the emotional aspects of our working memory in cognition through animation techniques.

The counterpart to the organic, traditional stylization of my film is that of a more commercialized, digital visual language, established by the rough, clean, color and shading passes of animation. This language within my film has been informed by years of animation in the form of entertainment, but Patrick McHale’s visual logic in *Over the Garden Wall* lies at the forefront of this content. Within the realm of western commercial entertainment animation, I have found only a few to be as impactful on my thesis as this series, simply due to the limitations of style and format that have been imposed by marketability and efficiency. However, *Over the Garden Wall* treads the line between pure artistic indulgence and the demands of the commercial studio. Thanks to the brevity of the series, the artists were able to maintain a romantic, Hudson River Valley inspired look of the backgrounds to offset the digital matte designs of the animated characters (Edgar and McHale). The contrast between styles within the series generates a sense
of displacement from the expectations of commercial entertainment as well as a more contemporary variation of historical art techniques.
CHAPTER THREE: THE SHARED EXPERIENCE OF MEDIALITY

Technology retromania and coping with change are two themes intertwined (Niameyer). The fast pace of technological advancements and the constant stream of new products and upgrades can make it difficult for individuals to keep up with the changes. This can lead to a sense of nostalgia and a desire to return to older technologies that were simpler and easier to understand. However, constantly dwelling on the past can also be a hindrance to adapting to new technologies and coping with change. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance between embracing new technologies and recognizing the value of older ones. By doing so, individuals can effectively cope with change and avoid being left behind in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. *Campbell & The Cryptid* celebrates how perception can affect reality, using a rough, comic-like style to shift the audience’s perception to that of an imaginative kid enjoying the outdoors before the age of smartphones. Through the combination of sci-fi content and nostalgic stylization, the film explores not only the development of an individual mind but also the societal response to a changing technological landscape.

Y2K Retromania

Today, Y2K retromania is emerging in contemporary media both through content and through form. New clothes, movies, and television series often represent a repackaging of early 2000s content into the pristine form of contemporary technology. Alternatively, certain bodies of media take on the form of analog media, low-quality renders, or the uncanny look associated with rudimentary technology. Even thrifted clothes from the early 2000s display a more immersive form of nostalgic content than clothes manufactured today because they represent a curated version of the past. Pixar’s *Turning Red* is a prime example of media that relies on content rather than form to establish an outdated setting. The film is groundbreaking in terms of
its visual finesse; however, references to Tamagotchi, Lisa Frank, and tween magazines bring the audience back to middle school in 2010. Similarly, *Campbell & The Cryptid* includes references to the science fair, playing outside, and 4” x 6” drugstore photo prints. However, the overall visual finesse of *Campbell & The Cryptid* references a storybook or comic book style, allowing the hand of the artist to overcome the technological adaptations of the film. Because of its stylistic digression from purely contemporary trends, *Campbell & The Cryptid* exists between the two manifestations of retromania, as it contains nostalgia in both form and content.

Despite recent exciting advances in technological aptitude and interconnection, there exists a residual sentiment for media of the past. While limited storage and generally clunky software may have been a frustration for content creators years ago, these limitations are now seen as a respite from the super consumption of never-ending media that can now be consumed at our fingertips in a heartbeat. Thus, the space for unrefined media in today’s society has been created as a form of escapism from digital reality, returning the artist’s hand, and individuality, to the content they create. In *Media and Nostalgia*, Niameyer argues that nostalgia is not only a companion of progress, evident across history, but also the product of a "crisis of temporality." Recent exponential advances in technology are pushing for an ever more ephemeral experience of life and media, with pictures, videos, and information constantly streaming into the masses. This influx is emphasized further as new generations attempt to hang on to the slower, more precious days of childhood. However, in today’s neoliberal society, the desire for nostalgic content has evolved into an enterprising retromania. Marketing nostalgia "does not generate a connection with one’s own lived and memories of the past, but rather fosters a feeling of desire or longing for an imagined past—one that can be directly translated or channeled into consumer desires" (Babb). This nuance largely differentiates the aforementioned categories of Y2K media,
as those that are content-driven more easily fall into the purpose of consumerism, while media of outdated form can more authentically represent the past.

**Analog Horror and Science Fiction Tropes**

A small area of technological regression, particularly in the horror genre, has been created by the trend of alternative content development. *Blair Witch Project*, SCP Foundation, *Ted the Caver*, and a litany of analog horror series exploit the use of a rough-and-ready modality reminiscent of real-life documentation. These pseudo-documentaries create an extra layer of believability that a cinematic production does not capture. *Campbell & The Cryptid* rejects this level of believability; however, the heavily outlined animation heavily references cartoons and comics of the time period back to which analog horror heeds. Furthermore, it incorporates common themes of analog horror, such as cryptids, liminal spaces, and childhood. The deconstruction and reconstitution of the ingredients of analog horror and twentieth century media in *Campbell & the Cryptid* thus appeals to an audience born between 1980 and 2000, as the nostalgia for this time period has just begun to emerge. Examples of this emergence include Youtube channels, such as Wendigoon, who has accumulated over two million subscribers to listen to his reviews of media involving horror and nostalgia. Additionally, nearly three hundred thousand people follow the Instagram account @liminal_club for their videos of melancholic, niche memories from the Y2K period. This strange and occasionally dark reminiscence of childhood is fitting when analyzed through the lens of this generation’s media, such as *Spongebob* and *Courage the Cowardly Dog*. A keen sense of uncanniness was present and celebrated in these lighthearted series. The result of this type of content consumption paved the way for "cursed" media, liminal spaces, and an analysis of the past that warps the perfection of contemporary social media content.
While *Campbell & The Cryptid* finds contextual footing within the movement for analog horror, the strange happenings of the film are a reflection of a mindscape rather than a purely imaginative form of fiction. Two plot devices in particular explore the intersection of science fiction and cognition. The first is the presentation of time, as it is compacted to capture the emotions of the main character, Campbell. Time is compressed not only for the sake of the short film but also as a reflection of the nonlinearity of human perception. Dawn peeks between the trees during the resolution of the film, not as a true indicator of time but instead signifying Campbell’s revelation after her adventure in the woods. Secondly, she encounters a strange creature on her journey that eventually dematerializes. This poses the question of the creature's existence outside of Campbell’s mind. Both of these elements, while also being tropes of the fantastical genres of science fiction and horror, serve to explore animation as a mirror of individual cognition as well as a collective social nostalgia. Animation, just like human brain function, is an imperfect collection of processes that store information. A constant influx of stimuli necessitates a more focused method of memory storage, only focusing on impactful matters (Torres). What constitutes an “impactful matter” is dependent on the person and situation; however, in the case of *Campbell & The Cryptid*, the primary impactful matters are nostalgia and coming of age.

Humans have always returned to the past in their exploration of self-expression. In many ways, it is a form of comfort. However, contemporary society has and continues to amass a gaping need for simpler times, formed by concerns about the impending artificial intelligence revolution, hyperconsumption of ephemeral media, and a neoliberal market formed to capitalize on emotional needs. These unknowns now weigh on the last generation of the 20th century, as society has changed radically since a not-so-long-ago childhood and the individuals of said
generation take on the already daunting task of developing as adults. Thus, *Campbell & The Cryptid* not only concerns widespread societal change but the change of the individual. It falls under a pseudo-sci-fi genre in which the past of technology is prioritized over futurism; however, the focus remains a moment of growth for a young girl. Ultimately, its handmade stylization provides a more introspective, rather than speculative, nature to the film, and the story expresses the psychological implications of fictional tropes.
CHAPTER FOUR: TECHNICAL EXECUTION

The fresh perspective of space that comes with working in a 3D software as a 2D artist is a valuable tool for visualizing new techniques for pushing aesthetic boundaries. This fascination appears in a growing number of popular media, such as *Into the Spider-Verse*, *Entergalactic*, and *Love Death + Robots* as it creates a realm free from the constraints of working in 2D or 3D space alone. As a 2D animator with a love for an unashamedly hand-drawn aesthetic, I found ToonBoom Harmony to be the best fit for my animation and compositing pipeline. While AfterEffects and Nuke provided various degrees of success in my experiments with lighting, color, and camera movement, there were two major issues that directed me to revisit previous technical needs in a new software. The first issue, purely logistical, was the complexity of moving between software for drawing, animating, compositing, and editing. The second issue emerged from the overly refined look of the final product. Both software served well in the automation of the animation processes, however, I found the freedom of working in Harmony more conducive to creating an unrefined, hand-drawn visual language. By merging the majority of my pipeline into ToonBoom Harmony, I harmonized the elements of my staging, animation, and compositing process, and to create the final look of my film in a manner useful for every shot of the film.

**Aesthetic Literature Review**

Exploring a variety of compositing software has necessitated a number of tutorials and outside assistance, particularly with programs that were less familiar to me at the start of my compositing process. My technical exploration began with tests to create depth in a 2D space. While two-dimensional depth can be implied through a number of manual methods, such as
blurring, spatial placement, and color diffusion, all of these will feel flat to a moving camera when captured in a single layer.

I first took a 2D-based approach to solving the issue of depth, inspired by an Instagram post from @LionYoungMotion regarding parallax in AfterEffects. I opened AfterEffects, keyed the layers of my background at different rates to imply a sense of depth to the environment, and was quickly able to create a dynamic parallax for a side-to-side camera pan. I then decided to explore further with a camera push-in using Nuke. I began by learning about image projection onto 3D geometry, but I experienced some difficulty applying the organic forms of my background to the structure of a rectangular prism (Siggerud). However, after following a tutorial from Hugo’s Desk on Youtube, I was able to import numerous layers of a background and automatically link them to the extent of the camera lens edges without any restriction of 3D geometry. This was a major step in inserting my 2D environment into 3D space because it allowed an entirely new way to view the world and navigate my camera frames. It also established the fundamental principle of using stacked layers, whether flat or geometric, to create depth in a shot.

Figure 9 Screen capture of parallax layers in Nuke
Understanding the principles of space in a 3D software was perhaps the driving force behind my shift to ToonBoom Harmony as a final compositing tool, because it also contains a 3D-esque organization of background layers that can be manipulated to simulate depth. I also adapted quickly to Harmony’s node system after using nodes in Nuke. I was able to achieve a similar look to that of the final product in Nuke as well as create my animation in-software after a brief introduction to the tools and interface of Harmony’s depth capabilities.

A similar series of realizations led me to shift technical resolutions from AfterEffects into Harmony as well. I initially keyed color mattes to create light and shadow over my main character, as well as adding a color gradient over the entire figure to unify her color scheme. The tutorial for this effect was based in AfterEffects, but I was able to translate the basic methodology into Harmony, my home software, to consolidate my production workflow (Johansen). Working with light animation in the same file as my initial character animation was far more forgiving and cohesive than importing the alpha to a different software.

Figure 10 Screen capture of AfterEffects layers and keyframes creating character shadows
Additionally, my third technical effect of the headlamp proved to be just as effective by using effects in Harmony as it was in my original plans in Nuke. I considered using Nuke to capture the effect of a headlamp because of its power in capturing 3D space, realistic effects, and ability to track an object. I was able to simulate the headlamp using a combination of Hugo’s Desk Volume Rays tutorial on YouTube as well as Johnny Howto’s tutorial on single-point tracking.
The final product, however, did not feel true to the hand-drawn aesthetic of the film. Moreover, the limited animation of my film did not require the degree of automated interpolation that I was expecting, so it was surprisingly quick to hand-animate a simple rectangle in Harmony to achieve a more rustic texture to the lighting while still maintaining the "light" quality of the effect. Ultimately, combining various aspects of my pipeline into a single software has allowed for greater technical and artistic expression in capturing the final look of my film.

**Compositing the Headlamp**

Even after consolidating compositing into a single software, ToonBoom Harmony, the headlamp required intensive troubleshooting to keep consistent in hue and intensity. I recreated...
similar tones, intensities and likenesses of this lighting effect by testing various settings and instinctually evaluating the results for continuity. In some cases, this would produce unusable shots. Conversely, it not only produced functional shots, but contributed to the handmade sensibilities of the film. Editing each shot together was akin to the patchwork of a quilt rather than the mesh of a sheet, creating an overall collection of unique movements rather than a seamless, uniform flow of scenes.

Scene three shot four in particular posed many technical challenges, with this headlamp at the forefront. At first, I thought I changed the parameters of the lamp accidentally, but after verifying previous shots, I found that the same settings yielded entirely discrete effects. I then took the multiplane and camera dolly of this shot into consideration, as there are five separated layers of trees to achieve the look of her run through Z depth. To test my theory, I exported and thus flattened the clip without a headlamp, then created a new file in which I added the lamp back. Once again, the settings did not behave as expected, and so I developed a hand selected method of creating new settings to mimic the old look.

Additionally, this shot required immense troubleshooting to resolve the moving background. The camera began to distort as I lengthened the clip past one full twenty four frame rotation, so I compensated by pushing in further at the beginning and adding more layers to the end. This way there would be greater physical depth in which the camera could roll backward. With little success, I then added a camera shake to emphasize the chaos and running motion of the shot. Additionally, after watching clips from *Promised Neverland*, I experimented with a synthesized depth of field in which I use a radial blur node and pulse a short sequence of the background passing by. This look combined with the realistic appearing headlamp in image 1 created an aesthetic far too cinematic to uphold the hand drawn visual language employed by my
film. In the end, this would only be one of many experiments, but by far the most developed in the furthest direction, before I returned to a simpler approach.

Figure 13 Comparison of headlamp tests
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I recently found myself in a conversation with Sasha Dorogov, animator on Disney’s Lilo & Stitch, Brother Bear, Pocahontas, and Hunchback of Notre Dame. Amidst the excitement of a rapidly evolving technological landscape, we discussed the unique ability of hand drawn, 2D animation to capture the spirit of the artist in a way that some modern methods cannot. Every animation serves its own purpose in the world, and as part of declaring this purpose the artist must decide how much of their hand needs to be present in the work. In line with this, I chose 2D animation as the medium for Campbell and the Cryptid to ensure my personal creative spirit was evident. I chose to exhibit texture, gesture, and inconsistencies in each frame of my film. These are the decisions that immerse the audience into a particular nostalgia: the age when you might read comics in the paper or run barefoot around the cul-de-sac, when experience was more important than perfection.

The process of creating Campbell & The Cryptid taught me that no one file will ever capture the depth of artistry that pours into an animation in its nascent stages. Animation is notoriously tedious, but through this labor the artist is gifted control over every small detail of the output. The production process is a living entity that allows for artistic exploration and hours of reflection on the human experience. Moving forward, I will continue to celebrate the minutia that compose a single frame of animation, informing my process with media references, personal experience, and observations from the everyday. In my research and in practice, I will explore unique aesthetics that capture specific, often intangible, experiences of life.

Campbell & The Cryptid is a snapshot of my experience growing up in early 2000’s suburbia. My own coming of age was set in a neighborhood much like Campbell’s; in a yellow
house surrounded by forest. By including my personal experience, I can more authentically explore the human nature of reflecting on the past. These reflections continue throughout life and are a defining feature of what it means to be human. Stories like *Campbell & The Cryptid* capture these ephemeral moments as a celebration of the evolution of identity.

Concerning professional progression inspired by the making of my thesis, I am beyond grateful to the community of peers, professors, and students that surrounded me at the University of Central Florida. The making of *Campbell & the Cryptid* was fostered by both my own intake of new knowledge and as a place to share my findings with other students of animation. Forging this film as part of the Emerging Media: Animation & Visual Effects Master’s program allowed me to analyze animation production through a pedagogical lens. As I look forward, I am eager to share the knowledge I gained through this production to continue the legacy of curious, authentic animators in my community.
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