

David Hall

Digital Worlds

Senior Project

1 May 2026

Post-Mortem

04|25|26 – 23:37 – All animation completed.

04|26|26 – 23:24 – Final Film is exported.

04|26|26 – 23:47 – Film published on [Behance](#) & [YouTube](#)

Prelude

To future UF students who will read this, unless the schedule has changed, you're likely to read this around February 20th, 202X. Now, whether you've been assigned this as a fellow 2D animator or doing 3D, or just a curious reader, I hope this cautionary tale of joy, heartache, perseverance, delusion, and ambition can offer some advice.

Looking at the timestamps above, you may realize that I did not complete the assignment on time. The final was due April 19th, and Convergence 2026 was on April 23rd. However, because I was doing such a good job, part of my delay being from poor communication, and because the professor and my peers witnessed first-hand how hard I was working, Prof. Karlson granted me this extra time.

To set the stage, it's important to note that I had no prior experience with cleanup or color, and I could count the animations I've done on two hands. I also managed 4 other courses alongside this, one of which being Adv. 2D Digital Animation Techniques with Prof. Cantrell because I really wanted to make sure my arm fell off this semester. Suffice to say, what I pitched was delusional but ambitious...great stuff. It was a disaster of passion. In my defense, my course's schedules were—as usual—not published ahead of time, so I had no good way of

knowing how heavy my workload would be. And besides classes, I ended up having to help my father with his construction work after he pulled out his back. Later, I helped move my mother upstairs and my sister and her husband out of the house after my Aunt and Uncle announced they would be moving back in.

Despite life's other demands, more than just 8 or even 10 hour days, I worked on this for 14+ on every day I could give it that kind of time. It was my work time and my free time. Yet, I never got sick of it. Despite everything, no obstacles buried my delight. Every case of exhaustion was my body failing me—not my mind. In the past, I've drawn plenty. I've played video games—demanding genres, too, like fighting games. I've played bass guitar and piano. I've written or typed 3000+ words in a day. I've done all these things in my day-to-day life, and I've never gotten carpal tunnel. However, this semester with this project...despite creative writing tasks being laxer and games and instruments being completely defenestrated...finally cracked me.

I staved that off as long as I could. I was mindful and worked to prevent it from the start. When drawing, I've learned to reserve my wrist movements for the tiniest strokes, my shoulder for the large sweeping motions, and my elbow for what falls in between. That and steady intermissions to exercise and stretch staved it off. It didn't come until later in development...when I couldn't afford to take any more extended breaks to prevent exactly this... that I couldn't work for more than 10 minutes at a time without feeling that pain. Because of how I worked, it hit my entire arm at once. I pushed through, though, and my brain learned to ignore it—like a headache that fades into the back of your head.

If you're handling other classes (especially ones revolving around drawing, modeling, or writing) or otherwise chained to your desk like some captive normal instead of a free radical, I

would advise you to do what I did: Make a point of getting up every hour to do pushups, hand stretches, walk around the kitchen while you make a cup of tea, or some other activity. Take the time to eat well, too. Instant crap and other junk food will bog you down and make you feel like molasses. Eat your veggies! You need your vitamins. Personally, I felt what it was like working with both. There were times when we were strapped for cash and had to settle for cheap take-out while we waited for the next check to come in to get groceries, and there were times when I was able to cook a salmon and toss up a good side salad because we caught it on a killer sale that week. The time you take to invest in your health will return to you at least twofold in your work.

First Movement:

Coming fresh out of Senior Project Research, I wanted to pitch small and put in as much quality as I could. However, as mentioned before, none of my course schedules were published ahead of time. This effectively cost me a week of the short time we had as we were advised against even engaging with the Senior Project Canvas page until we got a good grip on our workload for the semester. This guessing game...an unfortunate result of a prevalent issue with UF's courses persisting for two years without ever being fixed on more than a rare singular class basis...drastically affected how I conceived my 3 ideas and which ones I chose.

The ideas I chose were not small. They greatly served one goal or another. They all evoked my hopes and dreams. I wanted to show how animation is a medium, not a genre, so I came up with *Death or a Hallucination*, a film about an everyman who dies and is confronted with the nature of the universe. I came up with a great comedy that boasted mixed styles and a unique gimmick in the form of *Fry the Delivery Guy*. And, of course, I would pack my demo reel

full of impressive sequences with *The Joy of Animation*, which the professor aptly called a “Demo Reel Farm.”

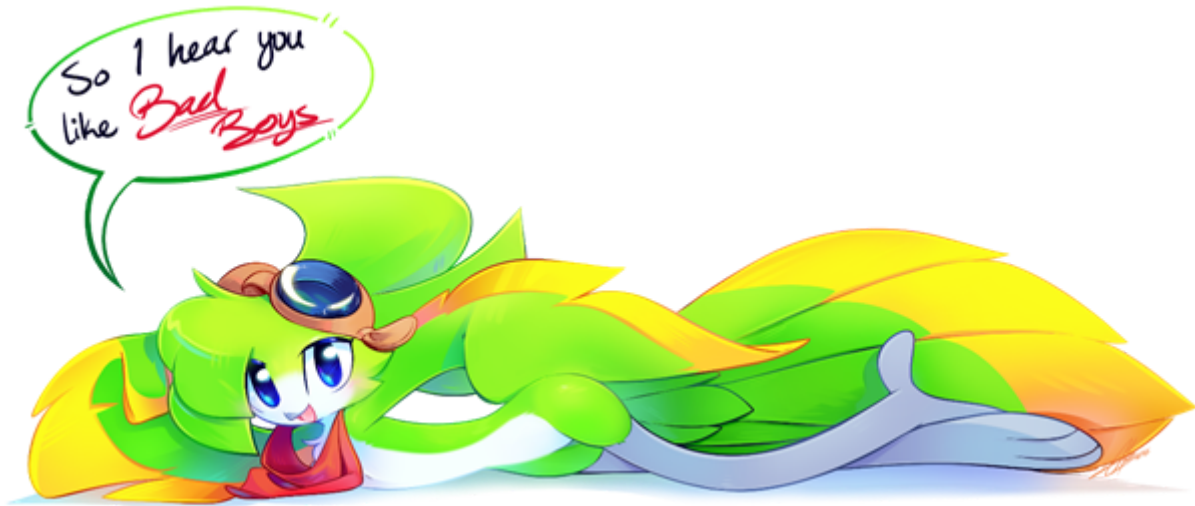
After talking with the professor, he noted how the story didn’t feel complete, but since I technically had enough animation to satisfy the requirement, it was okay to leave it open for a sequel or expansion like the original and now final version did/does. Admittedly, beyond stringing together the exercises, the story element was not my concern. I knew that by the nature and circumstances of this idea, things would be left on the cutting room floor because I either couldn’t figure out how to write them in or because of time constraints.

Ultimately, I agreed with the professor. It wasn’t cathartic to have the film end without Chip getting his gift basket. However, it was a bit funny and left the door open for expansion; he voiced as much. Since we had decided on having a gift basket in the film—something the character could *Guilty Gear Strive* for—I had come up with an alternate ending while working on the initial animatic. After sharing it, Prof. Karlson suggested that I see the new version through.

I trusted his judgement, and by the second animatic, I had almost doubled the film’s length with an additional 8 shots. Two were just bouncing eyes, and one was just a bust shot like shot 2. Surely, I could handle that, I believed. Foolishness, David...Foolishness. Remember this, because it will be important later. A storm was approaching.

One last note before getting into the production destruction...let’s talk about Chip for a minute. Although our Senior Project Research teachers seemed a little confused about this—even towards the end of the class—Prof. Karlson quickly forbade us from taking any ideas created for SPR into SP. However, I didn’t conceive or develop Chip for or during Senior Project Research. Additionally, Chip doesn’t have a defined world of his own; he’s akin to a Looney Tunes or

Mickey Mouse-esque character. That is to say, you can get away with putting him in whatever; continuity be damned. Thus, Chip slid his way into the character auditions for this film thanks to a loophole in the rules. The bird is problematic media. It's not the bird I would've liked to give UF on my way out (for legal reasons, I would like to remind those reading that this is a joke), but it's one the Fox censors can allow.



What a delinquent...a real cheeky bastard. Did I mention that my arm was falling off as I drew and painted this and I didn't care?...No? I didn't? Well, that all aside, if this weren't allowed, Prof. Karlson would not have approved it. Anyway, I made very few compromises with his design when taking him from my illustrated work into animation. However, I had the benefit of familiarity with his design thanks to that illustration work and even a few animation tests with him prior. That all undoubtedly sped up production.

After approval, students had 6 days to get their animatic for their entire film done. Emma and I had less, because the professor couldn't get back to us on our ideas until Tuesday. It's a bit late to say this now, as you're likely reading this after you pitched your three films, but...have your films scripted in advance. Because I had to do the scripting, shot list, storyboard, and animatic at the same time, the rushed nature of my animatic made doing the roughs more

difficult. To an extent, every frame in the animatic had to be resketched, but Shot 5 especially was so egregiously off model that I actually redid the animatic before moving into the roughs, rather than simply sketching over it.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Does anyone reading this remember the episode of *Kirby Right Back At Ya* where King Dedede hired the town to make an animation? That should be mandatory material for this class. You are every role. You are the writer, the storyboard artist, the animator (that includes roughs, keyframes, in-betweens, cleanup, and color, which would otherwise be separate job positions), sound engineer, editor, project manager, and director. We all know there's job creep in the animation industry, but you would never be expected to fill that many shoes unless you ran a one-man studio. And, in that case, you would have more options available to you than I did.

In UF's Project Management class with Professor Tim Difato and Professor Oliverio, we were taught to lowball our estimates to make them seem more appealing to the client. It was the idea of "it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission" in effect. That's what I practiced here. However, by closer working adults in my life, I was taught just the opposite, because when you ask for "permission" and things go better than expected because you sold them the worst-case scenario, everyone's happy. It may not be what Project Managers do, but I'll stick with that approach for the future.

I never want to be a Project Manager; I would much rather do the work than delegate and hold often redundant meetings that make everyone hate me. However, I did learn that you can't plan around your best. Things are bound to happen. One of your courses might go off-syllabus and introduce a new assignment, or bump one up a staggering 4 days from its previous due date.

You might be exhausted because your neighbor's dogs were barking incessantly at nothing for an hour straight at 4 or 5 AM right outside your window. A family member might injure themselves, and it's up to you to pick up the slack. You might also just have a day when you're off your game and seemingly can't draw the border of the circle to save your life. All of that happened to me, and by the last weeklies revision the professor allowed, my schedule no longer reflected what I believed I *could* get done, but what *had* to get done by that point.

And thankfully, I didn't get sick. I didn't get in a car accident...despite most drivers not knowing who has the right of way anymore and Tesla drivers running stop signs because they own a Tesla and are thus more privileged than you are. However, those things could happen to you. My script had no room for accidents, and I failed to deliver many of my promises on time as a result.

ORGANIZATION

This is basic but important, nevertheless. Folders within folders await you. I set up a Senior Project folder, and within that I had a folder for each of the following: assets, shots, audio, and checks. Within the main folder lies my shot list, weeklies schedules, and now my post-mortem. Each shot was a separate Clip Studio file. Within those, I would import the assets the shot demanded. I kept my animatic, roughs, cleanup, color, and post effects on separate animation folders.

Honestly, this is more difficult to write than it is to show, but really, to not drag this on any further than it needs to be, so long as you aren't putting all your backgrounds and shots in a single file, you and your computer should be fine. I'd also recommend backing up your work with a flash drive or cloud storage. I found a pair of 30 GB flash drives on Amazon for less than

\$15. Get something like that and back up your files. Then, if your power goes out and a file gets corrupted, or you need to take something to another device, you'll be prepared.

Second Movement:

After my animatic and non-animated object pngs were done, I felt well-prepared to head into the roughs and object animations. I was working steadily and for long hours on this project, but again, I truly enjoyed all of it. I realized early on that jumping between shots or points in a shot helped keep things fresh and interesting. It's all work that needs to be done, so keeping yourself engaged, rather than sinking into a repetitive drudge, will benefit you and the project. Ultimately, I had the most fun doing the roughs. However, I refined them more than I needed to; that made cleanup easier mentally, but it was nevertheless time-consuming.

Even so, I had my first shot finished at the beginning of March, just as the professor asked. Now, I can't hear your answer, but I do wonder: which shot do you think I finished first? Which one would you guess I finished last?

So, SPOILERS, the reaction to the target alarm was finished first. It was the only shot I finished that week...but it was my first one. As such, I spent most of that time researching and testing different ways to render my frames and how to animate Chip. It was a case of too much research and not enough development.

I ended up settling on a refined, light linework and vibrant flat color art style, with some added highlights on the eyes and goggles and a slight blush to bring the head and face to life. I realized early on that Chip's feathers exemplified secondary action excellently, which would smooth out otherwise choppy motions and hide how he was drawn on 2's, 3's and sometimes even 4's. This art style was feasible and familiar...well, almost feasible, anyway.

By this point in the dev engine, I was completing 1.5 to 2 shots per week. I could focus solely on my SP from Tuesday through Friday, and I could work on it after completing my other coursework on the other days. Notably, Professor Karlson remarked how most students set out to “lock in” during Spring Break but end up not. I locked in during Spring Break. I worked at a breakneck pace for how long the shots were, and we’re talking about doing cleanup, color, and post...but by this point in the semester, too little time was left. Something had to be done, or I wouldn’t have a finished film by Convergence, so I looked back to what I learned about project management.

The Beat-Drop:

When you’re running behind schedule, you have one of three options, and it’s recommended that you proceed through the options in the order they’re listed until the problem is solved. Those three options are:

1. Invest more money (bring on more workers and/or pay overtime).
2. Delay the delivery (in other words, push back the deadline to allow your staff more time).
3. Cut the scope (downscale the project).

I couldn’t hire more workers. It’s one thing to hire a voice actor, a musician, or a SFX artist, but hiring an animator was not allowed...not to mention out of budget. I could not delay the deadline; Convergence was not within my control. I only had the third option available to me.

I believed that since my original film was already approved before I expanded on it, it would be okay to scale my project back down to that, so I asked for permission. No response. Then it came time for the weekly deliverables, and I let my professor know what I was doing.

One week later, on April 10th, after the next deliverables were due, my professor emailed me asking where shots 9-16 were and told me that if I did not have those completed by May 3rd, I would fail the class.

Suffice to say, I was devastated. By this point, I had shots 5, 6, and 8 remaining, which are some of the longest in the film. I thought I would be a subhuman in the field if I could get this final version done in time for Convergence. It took me a little under 4 months to get this far—to get one minute of film—and now I was told that unless I completed another minute within a little over a week, I would fail. It was an impossible task. I had failed the class, and because it's not offered over the summer or fall, I would have to wait a whole additional year to take it again and graduate...all because of a misguided decision made at the beginning of the semester...a decision made to please the professor and anyone else who didn't want the film split into two installments...and a decision made because my other professors hadn't published their course schedules on time.

I took a few days to process all of that. I was able to focus on the silver-lining, but it was still frustrating. It didn't even feel like my fault. How could I even learn from this? In that time, I slept. I stared at the ceiling. I did a puzzle. I made a nice dinner. I consulted my peers for a potential course of action. I optimistically waited for a response from the Professor. And, thankfully, by the late evening on April 13th, I started working on shot 5 so that I could get it done for Tierra to use in her film. Devils never cry, after all

What was that silver lining? I already had an art job lined up after I got out of college, and it was not dependent on a bachelor's degree. While not exactly in the industry, it was more high-profile than a regular commission. I agreed to do paid work for an industry professional on the concept art, animation, and promotional comics for his game he's working on. I figured that

would last at least a year, and we could get a Kickstarter out of it. Besides, the job market right now is worse than it's ever been, especially for artists, thanks to you-know-who, so I'm not sure how much a bachelor's degree would really help anyway. Also, my Aunt is moving back in, and I've missed her greatly. I want to visit with her for a while...I wouldn't want to go across state, country, and especially not seas to get a job in the industry right away. As for the film itself, it meant that I could devote more time to it and not rush things. I could do some things I thought of later that would be unfeasible to change or add if I was still beholden to that hard deadline.

With all that in mind, I am truly thankful that Professor Karlson walked his statement back. I don't think I'll ever experience such an emotional 180° ever again. Motivation was at an all-time high. I was weightless...like a silver bullet. I kept on whirring. I turned the dial on the music and pushed past my limits...broke through it all...with a smile.

If there was a repeat sign...

Given the opportunity to do it all over, I wouldn't want to do this much differently. Above all, I'd like to head into this with my current experience...and obviously not expand on the film so preemptively. Had I been asked that question with my current knowledge, I would have responded, "I'm not opposed to the idea, but let's see where I'm at after Spring Break (around the midpoint of the semester)." That aside, Chip's design translated perfectly for animation, and I would encourage you to try drawing him if you want. I say that not as the creator of the OC, but as someone offering you a bite of their food because it tastes really good. He might serve as a good warm-up sketch.

I much preferred working in Clip Studio over Toon Boom, especially since the latter does not work on my computer, but maybe I should invest in Clip Studio's latest version

(post-graduation update: I did. Thank you Mom and Dad!). This is another reason I'm glad I cut the sequel/part 2 of the film: shot 15 was all about lip-sync. Clip Studio did not have audio scrubbing until version 5.0, and I currently only have a perpetual license for the latest version of 1.0. I did not know about the lack of audio scrubbing until I started working on shot 5, because there is a bit of lip sync there. It was trial and error to get it synced up right. Suffice to say, that was time-consuming and annoying, even for the short snippet that it was. Well, traditional animators had to do it somehow, and that's how I had to do it. In case you're wondering, the other vocal exertions you hear in the film simply required that the mouth be open or closed at the right time to work.

Postlude:

For me, this stress test has only solidified my choice in career. I am overjoyed by animation...by drawing...by writing...by art. No matter how much bullshit blazing I face, if it won't kill me, I don't need a new world order. I don't ever want to quit, and I hope the same goes for you. Even if that's just a tenth of yourself, it's undeniably you.

Life's a wild and crazy carousel...a labyrinth where you can't tell up from down. But, if you choose the right field, you'll be having so much fun, you'll forget to check where this crossroad's taking you. And when you face hardships, in this project or later in life, remember you are not alone; reach out to your peers and your professor. too! Moral support goes a long way. Or maybe you're the E.G.G.M.A.N. and you've got the master plan. In any case, turn the dial on my words now, as long as you don't quit, you'll be okay.