

Some Notes About My Writing Process

by
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First of all, in a perfect world, you just write what you want, and hand it over to a big fat studio. The big boss puffs on a large cigar and gives you his stamp of approval, then swivels in his chair to the giant vault of cash and presents a brick of 100 dollar bills and warns... "just don't go over budget!" Of course he always says that all the way up to the first screening after which he says, "Whatever you need son, whatever you need to pull off this masterpiece!". And presents another brick of bills.

However for the rest of us independent producers (in the real world) we have a lot to think about before we even press a key on the old Remington.

This is not to say large studios and even well-known directors are not hindered by budgets. They are.

But if you are producing independent animation in particular - much less film - you really have to think about a budget. Mostly time and effort, which equates to a budget, and on a very low practical level, just being able to finish a project at all.

And you have to acknowledge that a Pixar or Disney style of writing (from a production standpoint) is not going to fit a small independent studio or individual artist.

And so part of the skill of a writer at this level is about knowing production well enough to write for a budget. The next part is knowing story elements, drama and suspense well enough to find ways to craft this around potential production bottlenecks. And finally understanding the filmmaking process - film grammar and editing.

So to summarize:

The skills you need to be a low budget animation writer are:

- 1) Understanding Animation Production Inside and Out
- 2) Understanding the nuts and bolts of story
- 3) A good practical grasp of film grammar

And possibly more important than all of these combined is talent in writing and a good sense of creativity. It is not easy to be objective about this last one. But 1-3 are completely objective and if you use those well you can craft a decent story that sticks to a budget. And most importantly can even get done at all.

Now this is all assuming of course you have asked and answered the larger questions:

<https://blenderartists.org/t/the-larger-questions-you-should-be-asking/1178489>

So assuming you have dialed in the scope of your project you can start writing.

So the scope of this project was to come up with a small, very simple short story that my team could complete in a matter of a few months. It would be economical in that it would have no dialog, not a lot

of elaborate sets or complex characters.

So my first draft was simple and to the point.

The main character Angela Dawson, is attending dance classes at the Mallory Adams' Junior Academy of Dance. There will be a recital. However during rehearsal Mallory injures her knee. This effectively puts and end to the recital as Mallory will not be able to recover in time to teach the class. Angela is upset. And her mother decides to help. She finds a new high tech knee brace that will make it possible for Mallory to continue. Angela then becomes Mallory's coach through rehab and helps her get back into shape as a dancer. The dance class continues and the recital happens. Standing ovation. The end.

It had some good points. But on a broader stroke it felt like Angela might just be perceived as selfish. Which brought up a lot of more medical questions. Not the least of which, why would a doctor allow the teacher to go back to physical activity so soon?

So time was a factor and also what was the capability of this high tech device? As magic as it could be it still would require putting stress in the knee.

So I brought up these concerns to the team. And after bouncing some ideas around, I came up with what I thought was the best scenario. Basically we needed more drama. And we needed the medical aspect to be fairly solid and easy to convey.

So the decision was to show this as a career ending injury for Mallory. So that whatever solution was presented would be after she had healed from an operation. And provide a solution for her to continue her career. Not just give Angela her recital.

There were a lot of other ideas that also came out of this. But mostly they added more scenes and more time. So I decided on a very simple implementation of the idea.

So I left the bookends of the story in place. Beginning and end basically the same. However in the middle section I altered it so that as a result of the injury Mallory has to walk away from teaching. And it is only after her operation has healed, that the solution is introduced to use this high-tech brace that will allow her to get some mobility back and continue teaching. Then of course same ending. The recital happens and everybody wins.

As I mentioned there were a lot of great ideas that came out of this brainstorming session, but in the end I decided to only implement the ideas that would get us to a simple story solution and continue to be able to move ahead with production.

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