

**Christian Bengel**  
**Magitech: Duel For The Sundisk**  
**Spring 2021**



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**Final Documentation**

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**Thesis Mentor Lori Damiano**

Christian Bengel

Magitech: Duel For The Sundisk

Fall 2020

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Thesis Instructor: Melanie Stevens

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Thesis Mentor: Lori Damiano

Christian Bengel  
10/26/2020  
Thesis Critique Seminar  
Melanie Stevens

## **Thesis Proposal: Duel For The Sundisk**

For my thesis, I want to create a short animated action film that is set in a world where magic and technology exist in tandem. The aesthetic would be described as High Techno Fantasy. The story follows two characters. Our protagonist, Lee is a "Techgician", someone who combines magic with traditional technology. Lee is trying to retrieve a dangerously powerful magic artifact from an ancient tomb in Egypt. The other character is our antagonist, Waveform, he is a magic robot with power over sound. The two will fight over the artifact from my junior film called the Sundisk. As Lee fights for this powerful artifact to keep it from falling into the wrong hands he will also have to fight his insecurities. The disk itself is a bit more of a plot device that gives them cause to fight the only added baggage being that it connects to my last film. I will present the film in a late development state where the bones of the project are finished and ready to build upon after thesis. However time permitting, I will present the film completely finished.

The line of inquiry comes in two parts. The first is to explore the feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence, and being at an emotional low when it comes to interacting with a passion. These feelings are brought on by the perception of failure or inadequacy. This stems from my own insecurities about the art I've made over the last few years. I started creating art only a year before entering college. Having the pressure of academia be present in the majority of my art career so far has had some negative impacts on how I see my art. I'm channeling these feelings into Lee as he explores his own emotions about his magical prowess and his inventions. As I am overcoming those feelings now, so will Lee as he overcomes challenges both internal and external.

For the second part of my line of inquiry, I will be utilizing an art style that lends itself well to action animation, while still keeping it grounded enough to convey the emotions of the characters. I want the visuals to draw inspiration from my work, action cartoons of the last decade, and shonen anime of the last few decades. Important examples would be Rise of the TMNT, My Hero Academia, Star Wars Rebels, RWBY, and the visual art direction in games like Valorant. Visuals like these can stylize and simplify features and character designs so they're easier to animate, while still giving them human proportions.

The plot of the film revolves around Lee and Waveform fighting for the Sundisk deep within the Valley of Kings. It picks up after my junior film and will have Lee overcome his insecurities in order to defeat Waveform at the climax.

The film will be a two to three minute 2D animated short, done primarily in TV Paint. The process of the film will involve me animating it on two's and three's and only really having 2 characters that appear for the bulk of the film in order to save on time. In addition, the backgrounds would be a fairly simple desert landscape with the primary purpose of the environment will come from how the characters' powers constantly affect the battlefield; slowly shaping it from something mundane into something very intricate and altered by the characters actions. For example if Lee uses fire magic, he may turn the sand to glass, or Waveform could blast apart sand dunes. This allows more creative freedom in creating backgrounds. Aside from that the process would be fairly traditional: first storyboarding, then roughing out the key frames, animating the roughouts cleanup color, so on and so forth. Finally, I will put the footage into both After Effects and Adobe Premier to add the finishing touches. As I stated in the opening paragraph I'm aiming to turn in the film during a developmental stage and finishing it time permitting. If that is the case than it would likely be turned in with the roughout animation done with varying degrees of cleanup and color as well as the expected sound design described as follows

Another component of this would include voice recording, sound, and music. Both characters wear masks so animating mouth movements wouldn't be too difficult. I would only need to animate about 20-30 seconds worth of dialogue. This will involve me writing out the script in tandem with the storyboarding. This would be fairly simple as my software "Storyboarder" has text options. The dialogue would only be a few brief exchanges. However, the challenge will be finding people to record it.

This project will be collaborative. I will need a male voice actor, and a female voice actress. I already have two people who have done voices for Waveform and one for voice Crystal, another character who briefly appears at the film's start. My friends Ploton Hogan, and Lainy Collado will provide the voices for all of the characters. Both of them have shown that they can voice the respective roles well in prior projects. In addition, Ploton has agreed to take on the role of Lee. He has the acting ability to make himself sound distinct, and I will be using voice filters and the process of vocoding to make Waveform sound like an actual robot. My best friend Jonah Bloom is a music major at OSU, he has already agreed to create the soundtrack for the film and potentially help me with sound design. The film's music will have a sound that blends electronic instruments and traditional instruments, while its general sound to be more grounded and natural so the more techno/mystical sounds the characters produce stand out in contrast.

My goal is to at least create the foundation work for all of this and finish it if possible. If I do not finish then I will have all the developmental work done. The roughed uncolored animation will be done with a few colored and finished scenes and the audio recorded and synced but potentially not finally mixed. Ultimately I will turn in the film in a state that I can build upon and finish outside of school while still showing a clear vision of the final product.

To summarize, what I want to do is make a character driven short that maintains a fun tone as we watch its protagonist grapple with and overcome the insecurities that stem from his failures. In doing so creating something that is visually stunning but still holds emotional weight and meaning to it. Even if it's still in a developmental state, I want the final product to reflect the line of inquiry I've described here. A film that I am able to channel my own emotional struggles into while also showing my passion for action animation. A film I can be proud of.

## **Artist statement**

I've always had a love for stories and storytelling. When I was very young and discovered Star Wars something about that experience just clicked for me. When I discovered in high school that storytelling was something I wanted to pursue I knew I wanted to animate it. To me, animation is one of the most creative ways you can bring something to life. The ability to draw a design and make it move even though it really shouldn't is part of why I love the art form. You can make physically impossible things believable. The reason why 2D animation and action-heavy animation in particular appeals to me is because of how fluid and dynamic it can look. I want to tell stories with a lot of intense and entertaining action as well as a deep understanding yet fun narrative. While Dual For The Sundisk is only a part of a grander narrative that I have isolated into one short sequence; I think it's my first big step in that direction.

# Dual For The SunDisk Abstract: By Christian Bengel

Action Animation is something that I've loved since I was a kid, the dynamic motion, the camera angles, and often the creative artistry behind the work. My love for the craft of animation has largely been fueled by this genre and because of this, I was excited to explore this subject for my thesis in the form of a film.

*Dual For The Sundisk* is a 2D animated action short film about a wizard in a sci-fi battle suit fighting a magic robot with speakers for limbs. The two fight for a magic artifact called the Sundisk. The film is meant to be a slice of a much larger story that I have had in my head for the last several years. The greater story's premise is that a group of unlikely heroes travels across an alternate earth in which magic was real. The narrative would follow eight characters, four heroes, and four villains. The basic premise would see the two groups constantly clash as the heroes try to keep various magical artifacts safe from the villains all while learning about the different histories of the places they visit. This specific project was going to be much more narrative-heavy and it was to be a sequel to my junior film, "Legend of The Sun Disk" and follow Lee, one of the aforementioned heroes as he fought waveform for the disk in a much more narrative-heavy capacity that would have hinted at the greater story elements in place. However, due to the limited time granted to create this project I retooled it to focus on one goal which was to create an effective fight scene. This meant I got to focus more on the animation itself. The film is animated entirely within the TVPaint software program. The editing was done in Adobe Premiere. The storyboarding and the animatic were completed in the drawing software Procreate.

My goals with this project were fairly simple. I wanted to test my abilities in action animation. More specifically I wanted to push myself to try and deliver on an animated project that has choreography and effects that can come across as visually engaging, I also wanted to test my current abilities as an animator. I haven't had a chance to experiment with this type of animation before and I want to see just how far I can take it.

All of these elements together have created a project that I am very proud of and excited to share at my defense. I feel like through this project I've also learned a lot about myself and my current skill level and it has helped me assess what direction I want to go as I continue to pursue my craft and also helped me see where I can improve. I hope this short film can show both my love for the genre of action animation and my passion for my craft as a whole.

# Bibliography

Dassler, Samuel. *Extra History: Akhenaten - A Pharaoh Obsessed*, 2019.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKSqgLQNIeQ&ab\\_channel=ExtraCredits](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKSqgLQNIeQ&ab_channel=ExtraCredits).

The extra credits program does a variety of history topics but their program on Akhenaten, however brief, provides great context to the period and characters that my junior film was based on and that carry over into the present film. The video is a summarized history of Egypt's Amarna period which the bulk of my junior film was based on. The final film doesn't reflect this nearly as much as most of the narrative was cut to focus on the animation but the sun disk does still appear in my film

Legend Of The Sundisk. Christian Bengel: Legend Of The Sun Disk. Vimeo, 2020.

<https://vimeo.com/382959341>.

This is my junior film, the film follows the journey of the device called the Sundisk which functions as the McGuffin and or object of interest within my thesis project. Legend of The Sundisk is a fragment of the history of this alternative earth in which my project takes place.

Filoni, Dave. Whole. *Star Wars Rebels*. Los Angeles , California : Disney Channel, 2014.

Star Wars Rebels was an important show for me growing up and is what partly inspired me to pursue my career in animation and storytelling. The show is an action-adventure series set within the star wars universe. It represents the kind of storytelling I'm interested in. I find its character-driven narrative and the family dynamic the main cast has to be incredibly endearing especially when taken in tandem with the shows overarching themes of found family, hope, justice, and support. While it is no longer relevant to the final film, I would not be in this program without this show

Suriano, Andy, and AntWa Ward. Whole. *Rise Of The TMNT*. Los Angeles , California : Nickelodeon , July 20, 2018.

A show that I found relatively recently. Rise Of The TMNT doesn't offer too much story-wise, at least to this project, but its action animation is superb and represents the feeling and visuals that I seek to get out of my work and hopefully explore through thesis with its very kinetic and impactful sense of motion and dynamic use of perspective and camera.

Luna, Miles. Whole. *RWBY*. Austin, Texas: Netflix, July 18, 2013.

<https://roosterteeth.com/>.



RWBY much like Rise Of The TMNT is primarily an inspiration in terms of visuals as its set-piece action fights are the main series draw. RWBY is a show I've been following since I was 15 and has served as a constant inspiration to me in how I can specifically construct fights between characters in animation and how I can make their movements feel both natural and impactful despite how outlandish they may seem.

Boku No Hero Academia/My Hero Academia . JNN/NNS/AdultSwim, April 13, 2016.

BNHA's vibrant color palette and very on the nose character design is something I've always admired. The characters' visuals convey what they do with about as much subtlety as a thrown brick with a note tied to it, but I don't think that's a bad thing and I think that can be very good when done well, and that's something I'm pursuing with my own visual design.

Riot Games, Valorant, Riot Games, Personal Computer/ Windows Operating System, 2020

Valorant's character art is something that I admire, it's in the same vein as BNHA but its proportions are closer to those of an actual person which is the direction my character design style tends to lean. So that art serves as something that I can draw on for examples.

Konietzko, Bryan, and Dimartino, Micheal. Whole. *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Los Angeles, California: Nickelodeon, 2005.

Airbender is a show in a similar vein to Rebels that tells a compelling narrative with a very character-driven plot. However something specific I'm drawing on this show for, at least in this instance. Is the way it does construct its action. Airbenders action is good but it's not the reason you watch it. You watch it because of how the beautiful animation compliments its beautiful story. Fights happen for a reason in Airbender, not just because they're fun, they carry a lot of emotional weight even if a lot of it is involved in spectacle fighting. That's something that I seek to emulate and make my own. For the purposes of this project, I'm primarily drawing on it as a source of visual inspiration rather than narrative

Wizards RPG Team. *Eberron: Rising from the Last War*. Renton, Washington: Wizards of the Coast, 2019.

The setting of Eberron from the TableTop RPG Dungeons and Dragons is a strong influence on how some of the aesthetic of my characters in this alternate earth look and operate. Ebberon is visually much closer to high fantasy however its world is

filled with magical robots, flying skyships, and introduced the idea of the artificer, someone who combines magic with technology into the D&D franchise upon the setting's initial inception. Its design philosophy serves as a good example of how to combine the aesthetics of fantasy and science fiction which is very helpful for my film

Riot Games, League Of Legends, Riot Games, Personal Computer/ Windows Operating System, 2009

League of Legends has many characters that, like Eberron, fall into this category of wielding Magic and Technology together. While those characters certainly are a source of inspiration. Riot has created a line of cosmetics for many of their characters called "Project" which re-imagines them in a much more cyberpunk future setting that adds this sci-fi touch to their magical or otherwise powers. I've drawn on this aesthetic to create characters like Waveform and Lee who embody this union of opposing concepts.

*Samurai Jack*. Los Angeles, California : Cartoon Network, August 10, 2001.

Genndy Tartakovsky is a savant when it comes to silent action animation and while the main body of his work is full of it, *Samurai Jack* is the main example I'm drawing on for this project as its full of still shots much like my own film and then uses those pauses and moments of back and forth to help sell the actual motion better. Which is something both my film and his work have in common.

Wikipedia contributors, "Monty Oum," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Monty\\_Oum&oldid=1016184188](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Monty_Oum&oldid=1016184188) (accessed April 28, 2021)

I'm not too keen on using Wikipedia as a source but this is the most accessible information I can find for this individual. The late Monty Oum was an animator who mostly operated outside the industry of network animation. Most known for working with the formerly independent company "Rooster Teeth" on their show "Red Vs Blue" during its eighth season of production and then going on to work on "RWBY" a show I cited earlier. Monty had a natural gift for working on over-the-top action sequences in his work and it's a style I'm trying to adapt into my own.

# Duel for the Sundisk



A film by Christian Bengel



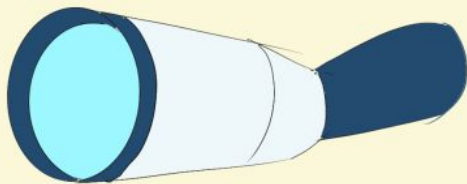
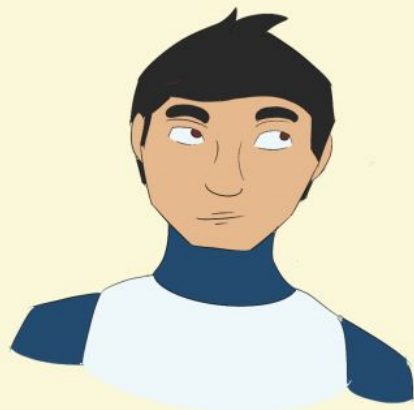
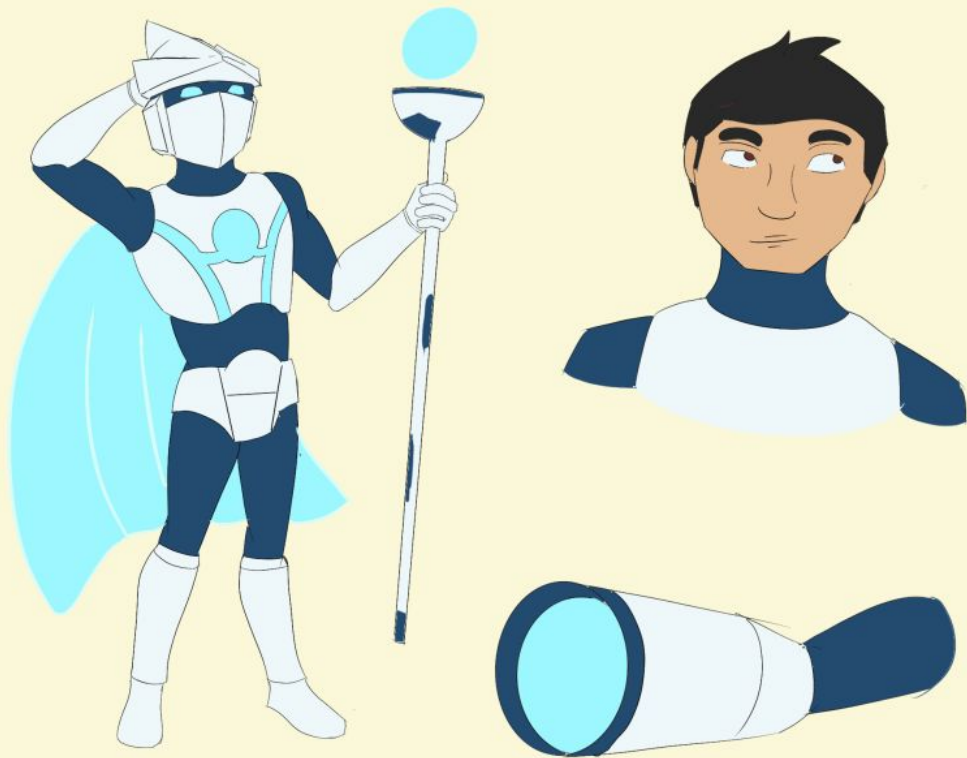
# What is this project about?

- An experiment in action animation
- A test of personal skill and a lesson to learn to advance my craft and passion
- Conceptualizing space and choreography in a 2D environment
- Showing a bit of a world and characters I've been working on for a long time

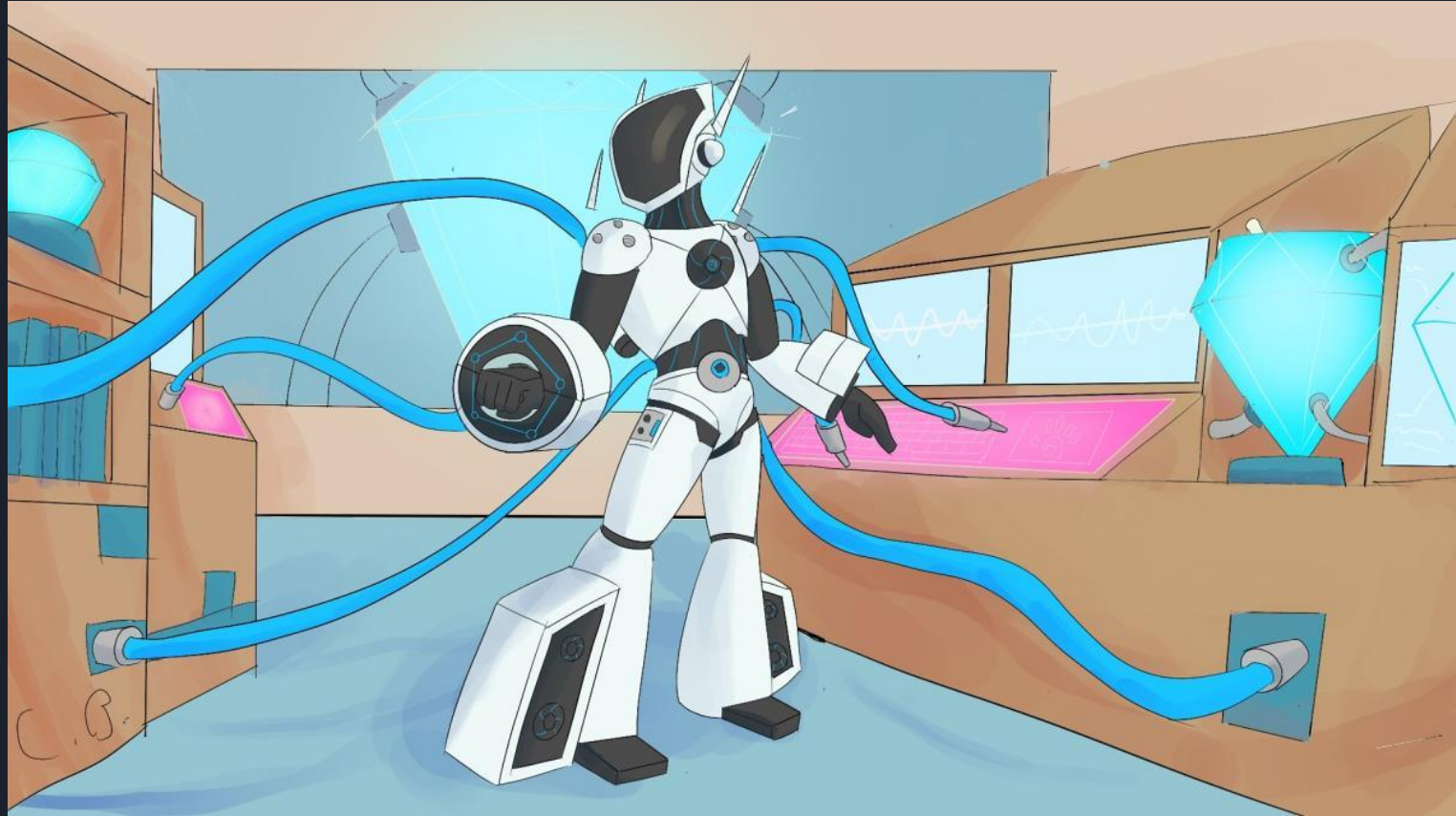
The Idea, two of my characters fight for a magic disc



# The Characters: Lee The Wizard

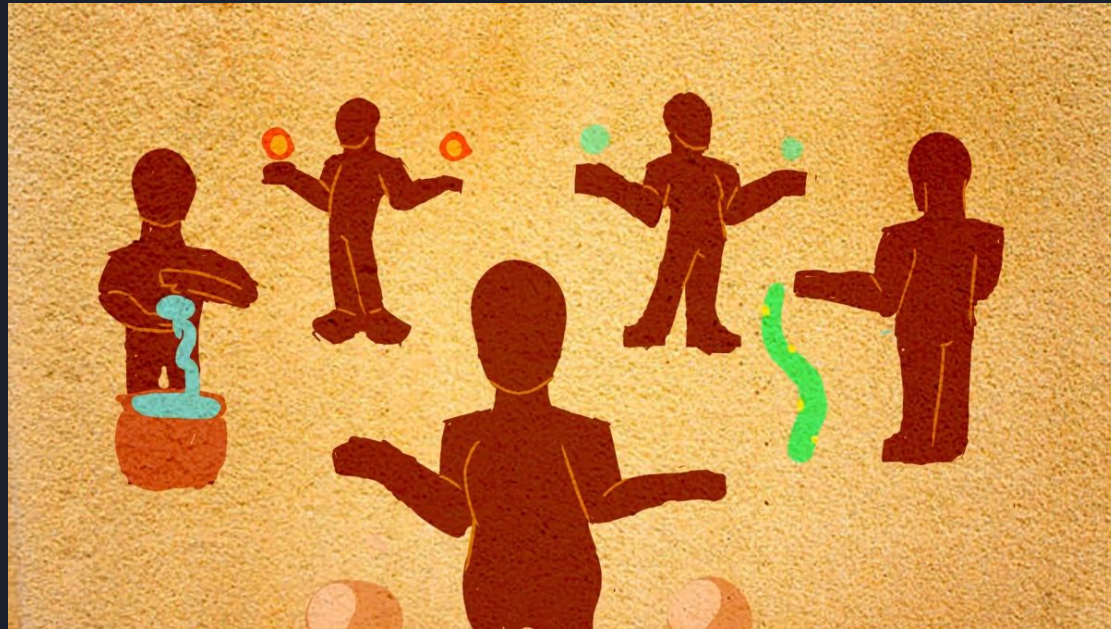


# Waveform: The Sound Robot



# The disc

- The Subject of my last film
- Previous film told that story







# Production

- Animatic was made in Procreate
  - Rough keyframes and important details flushed out in this stage
  - Example gif in the earlier slides
- Animation was done in TVPaint
  - Linework and color as well as rough
  - Digitally hand drawn
- Music was done in Ableton Studio
  - Don't ask me about this, this is Jonah's domain
- Backgrounds were done in TVPaint
- Final editing was done in Adobe Premiere
  - Compiling clips and doing small frame and camera tweaks
  - Music and effects



**TVPaint animation**

**11**



# The goals of this project

- To test my current abilities
- To explore a genre of animation I feel passionate about
- To show elements of a world I have had ideas for, for a long time
- To imply a simple narrative that gives some motivation, however light, to the action.
- To make the animation very visually engaging
- To animate fully in a lined and colored film which i had not done before
- To learn a professional level software to facilitate that learning

# What made me wanna do this?

- Action animation is something I've loved since I was a Kid
- I consider myself a storyteller and while the story from this was cut its still something I pursue
- I feel like animation is one of the best ways I can explore my ideas for stories worlds and also over the top action and effects. I find it the best way to illustrate what I imagine. There's things it can do that live action cannot.
- It can bring the improbable or impossible to life. It's also not as resource heavy
- I want to make stories and animation that both me and my audience find fun to watch and I feel like this film is an important step on reaching that goal.
- Rule of cool

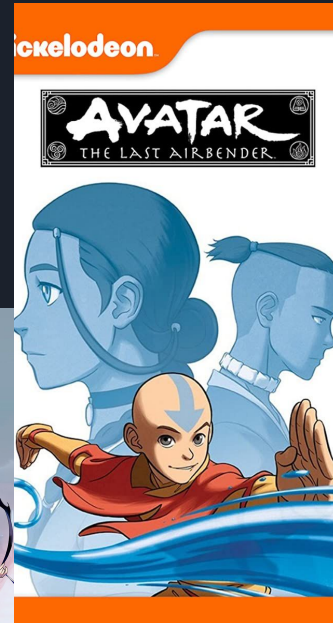
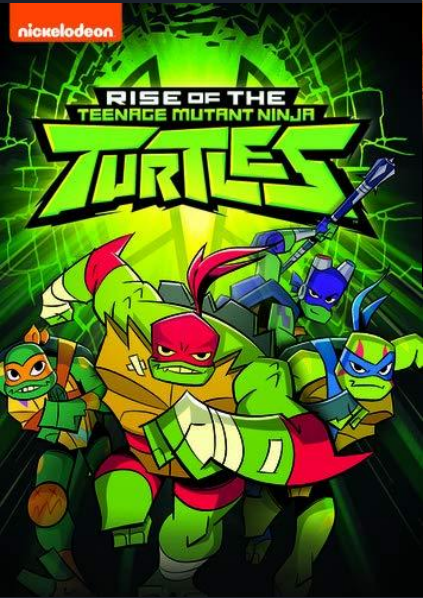




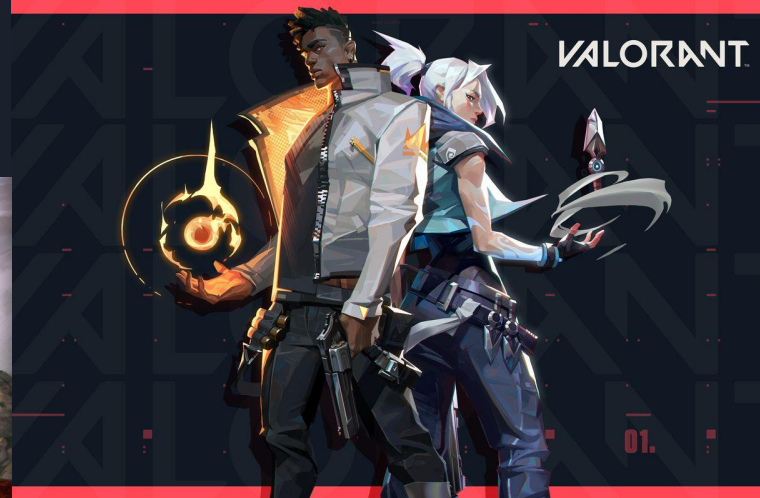
Please find the link in chat

<https://vimeo.com/543452347>

# What Inspired Me and Why



# Design Inspirations



# What Has Changed Between Proposal and Defense

- Alot
- But specifically
  - The story was gutted
  - The run time was reduced by a third, then lengthened back out to about half
  - The background artwork quality absolutely dropped to focus on the choreography
  - No actors
  - Lee's cool magic hologram cape





# Audience and Platform

- Portfolio piece and demo reel material
  - Used for job and career opportunities and viewed by relevant parties
- A work sample for finding collaborators
- Would stay on my professional Vimeo page for public view
- If this were a show, it would be directed at age groups of 13+ and action animation fans
- I'd want this to occupy the niche of more adult or mature animation that exists between the very crass and gory stories and general audience programming.





# Future Directions

- I want to let this rest for a while and come back to it with fresh eyes
- After school I do want to pursue an industry job
- I want to buff up my general art skills
- I want to attend a few PCC courses on writing for film and TV
- I really want to learn to paint digitally
- I want to nap (I will not be available for at least 3 hours after this presentation)



Questions?