

### **Integrative Project Thesis**

Over the past two years I have been working extensively on a personal project that eventually evolved into the final student piece that I will contribute to the University of Michigan School of Art and Design: my Integrative Project. My IP is an animated piece that explores story telling, an art form that I am most interested in. The animation itself started off in Heidi Kumao's Animation for Broadcast class under the title Cookie Crumbs, it then rapidly evolved into The Sad Panda Fellowship in David Chung's Moving Image class, and finally The Sad Panda Fellowship Part One: Your Beauty and Your Beast in my senior year. Over the past two years the project has evolved and matured, almost everything about it changed except the fact that my passion for it has never dwindled.

There are ups and downs during the process of creating this piece, but I am proud to say that The Sad Panda Fellowship, even if it might not be my most successful piece to date or even survive the test of time, will remain close to my heart for years to come. I have learned a lot from this project for the past few years, mostly through failing in all possible ways. I have faced many obstacles both technically and conceptually. The programs I used to create this piece started off as unfamiliar tools. The story I wrote and the themes I tried to tackle were rejected or even feared by both my professors and my fellow students. Fortunately for myself, none of these aspects were enough to stop me from creating this piece. Some might say it is because I am a stubborn young man, and that is very true. But I say because The Sad Panda Fellowship is not just a school project

for me. It is connected to me conceptually as well as personally. I do not see it as an epic story that would inspire the world or innovate the mindset of the new generation. I see it as a representation of my lifestyle and my strong believes that our minds can conquer any kinds of hardships.

The story of The Sad Panda Fellowship focuses on a young woman named Velle and her short but quirky adventure with her genie companion named M.I.C. Velle is a very unlucky girl, her mother died when she was young and since then she was brought up in an abusive family and is subjected to rape by her father. The setting so far is very much like a traditional fairytale, except Velle is suicidal. The only thing stopping her from ending herself is the unfortunate yet humorously ironic fact that she is actually an immortal. Confused and angry about herself, Velle eventually encounters M.I.C, who offers to grant her the wish of death in return for one coin to fill his wishing well. As the story progresses it becomes clear to Velle that M.I.C is here to mislead her and cause more trouble than help. Velle's character is faced with many different hardships, she is physically tortured as well as mentally damaged, but throughout the course of the story her character would grow and overcome these hardships.

Many people cringe or give me a strange look when I explain to them the premise of the story, and I have been criticized for not presenting myself properly when I explain the movie. However, I do not believe that an artist is inseparable from his or her art. We are judging the art not the artist, a reader is reading the book not the author, and the audience is watching The Sad Panda Fellowship and not me. It is true that no matter what, consciously or subconsciously; a bit of us is injected into our work. However that should not matter because I should not compromise my vision of the story because I am

afraid of what others may judge me as. If The Sad Panda Fellowship would be so easily influenced, I would not consider it to be a story worth telling at all.

Although The Sad Panda Fellowship has been met with various degrees of negativism, it is not the first of its kind to venture through themes such as rape, suicide and child abuse. There are many directors out there with stories that feature similar themes, and are immensely successful. My professor often reminds me that my work resemble movies done by Quentin Tarantino. Although I dislike Tarantino as a director, I admire the way he interweaves humor into his often extremely dark stories. This method helps make his otherwise unbearably violent movies that much more enjoyable. An example would be Natural Born Killers and Inglorious Basterds, both movies are written by Tarantino but only Inglorious Basterds is directed with his vision. Natural Born Killers degenerated into a convoluted story with almost nothing but an explicit amount of violence. While Inglorious Basterds retained it's violence but sugar coated it with an outrageous style of humor that is almost like a cartoon. Both movies are equally violent but one is much more stomach able than the other. I truly appreciate this technique and would wish to implement it into The Sad Panda Fellowship. Although Velle is subjected to violence and the story gets progressively darker near the end, I try to balance it out with dark humor as much as I can just like Tarantino.

Aside from Tarantino, Gen Sekiguchi's Survive Style 5+ also heavily inspired me. Survive Style 5+ is quirky Japanese comedy that features multiple storylines that weave themselves together, very much like Babel and Crash. The difference here is that Survive Style 5+ is presented in a very comedic manner, while criticizing the culture of modern Japan. The movie features extremely bright colors, and it is clear that the art

direction is heavily influenced by Japanese Anime culture. The actors exaggerate themselves, and the action defies physics in a comedic way. However each character faces a certain obstacle in the story that closely resembles real life. One of the main characters was hypnotized into thinking that he is a bird. Before he could revert the hypnotist was assassinated and he was stuck with a birdbrain for the rest of the movie. His family was in denial until they finally accept him as who he is at the end of the movie when he learns to fly in a human body. The situation is outrageous but the turmoil and conflict within the characters is just as real as anything we would face. Just like us they are put into cruel situations where they must adapt, learn and overcome. Another storyline features a very troubled married couple, where the husband is desperate to kill his wife once and for all. He tries many times and fails miserably. After each assassination attempt his wife would beat him mercilessly. Through these violent encounters, they begin to learn about each other again. Unfortunately at the end of the movie the wife is assassinated and dies just when the husband realizes how much more about her that he wanted to know. Just like these characters, Velle is thrown into an extraordinary situation that is impossible in reality. . She is a suicidal immortal that is being tricked by a genie. However, ignoring all the supernatural elements in The Sad Panda Fellowship the story boils down to a child trying to escape her problems, but is ultimately forced to face them head on instead of running away. The Sad Panda Fellowship is a character driven story about optimism and the will to survive in the disguise of a fantasy adventure.

The Sad Panda Fellowship challenges my technical skills in drawing, painting, animating as well as story telling. Each aspect is equally important, and I admire those

who can manage all of these aspects and still retain the highest quality. Although I do not think I have achieved the best in all of these aspects I hope that one day I would retackle this project with better talent and resources at my disposal.