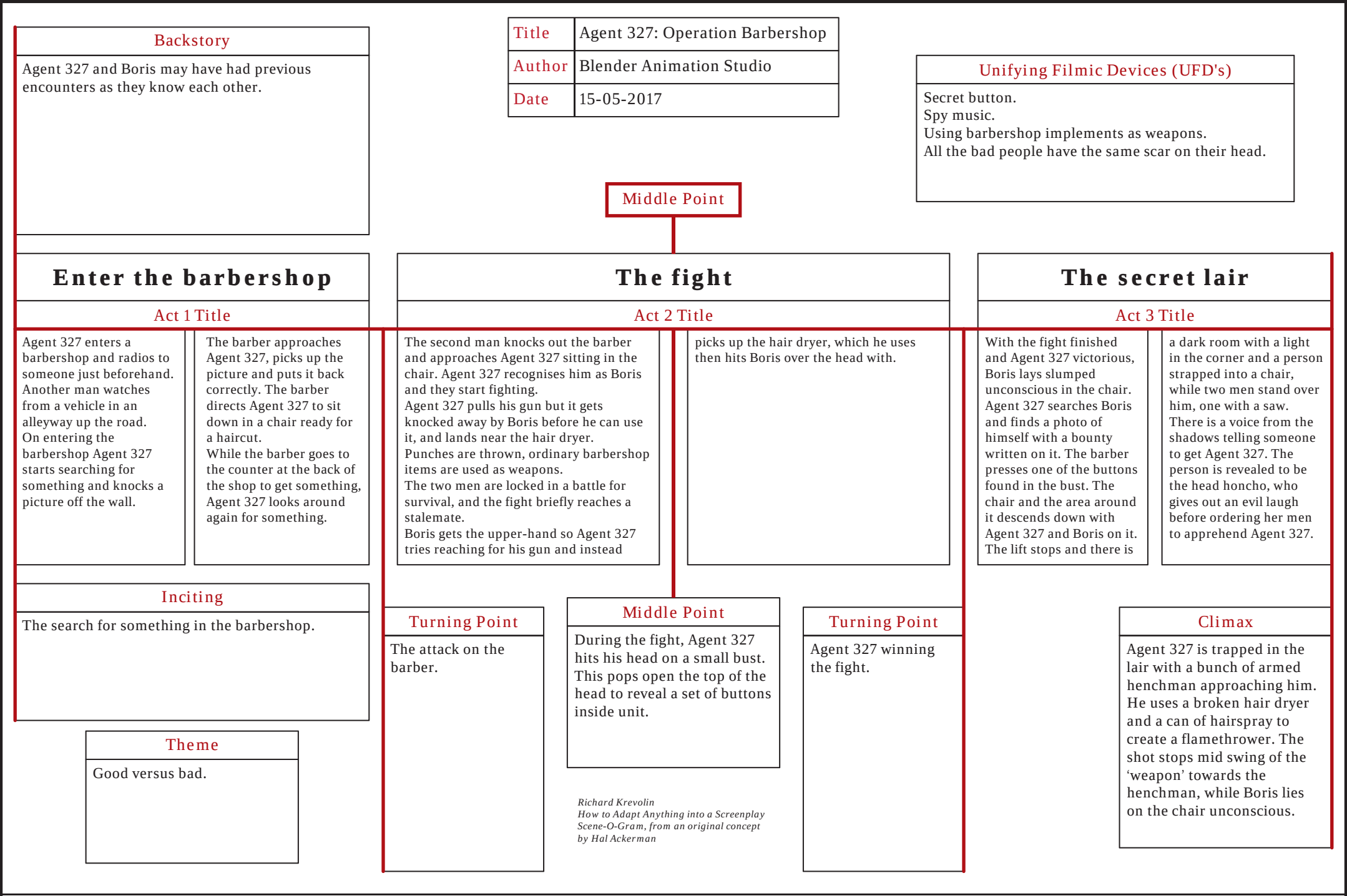




Agent 327: Operation Barbershop – An analysis

Introduction

Dutch artist Martin Lodewijk created Agent 327 as a comic book series, which has been showing his exploits since 1968. Every part of the animation, including rendering, was produced in Blender, by Blender Animation Studios.

“Hendrik IJzerbroot – Agent 327 – is a secret agent working for the Netherlands secret service agency. In the twenty comic books that were published since 1968, Martin Lodewijk created a rich universe with international conspiracies, hilarious characters and a healthy dose of Dutch humour.” (Blender Animation Studio, 2017)

Agent 327: Operation Barbershop is a 3 minute (almost 4 minutes with credits) 3D animated video, with action and humour. It is professionally made with funding provided through the BlenderCloud subscription system.

The short film

The video starts with dramatic music and a view of rooftops from above, then the camera pans down towards a street with buildings on either side. As the camera moves in further it focuses on a man in a suit bending down and looking through a low window of a barbershop.

He lifts his left hand up and presses something on his wristwatch with his other hand. A little aerial appears out of the watch. He speaks into the watch saying he is going in and gets an affirmative response from an unknown voice. This interaction reveals he is called Agent 327.

The theme music sounds very similar to James Bond and immediately invokes an atmosphere of mystery and excitement for what happens next. Agent 327 is well turned out, dressed in a suit with a tidy hairstyle. He seems like a man of business and a well thought out plan.

With the camera facing Agent 327 he walks off to the right and the shot continues over his shoulder towards a distant alleyway. In the alleyway a truck slowly approaches the edge of the main road and stops, there appears to be someone watching him. The camera moves in on the truck to reveal a man sitting in it watching Agent 327. He has something resembling a piece of paper in his hand which he looks at before folding it and putting it in his coat pocket.

The man in the truck looks decidedly evil based solely on his features, which makes him look sinister and almost inhuman. This is also added upon by the way he is acting in the van.

With the camera looking from the back towards the door of a dark and seemingly deserted barbershop, Agent 327 walks in and starts looking around. He starts knocking on the wall just behind the door, then pulling a picture away from the wall as suspenseful music plays. He moves his search to a shelf and knocks a book over in the process, which subsequently knocks a picture off the wall at the other end of the shelf. The picture falls and bounces off the head of a bust of a man with a large moustache. As this happens, the back of the barber's head comes into the shot as he watches Agent 327 fumble with the picture. As Agent 327 tries to put it back he

notices the barber and panics as he doesn't know which way round the picture goes, so he guesses, incorrectly. The barber rotates the picture round to its correct orientation.

This scene sees an initially confident looking character of Agent 327, suddenly turn into a bumbling fool and trying to get himself out of the situation but not knowing what to say. This adds a touch of humour to the story and gives some depth to the character.

They have a short amount of small talk before the barber asks Agent 327 if he would like a haircut, he says yes and is directed towards a chair and sits in it. The barber walks over to the back counter for something, meanwhile, Agent 327 continues his search on the unit in front of him. He knocks over a hair trimmer stand, which looks like a man holding the trimmer. As it falls, it comes apart, with the little arms and head rolling over the unit and hitting a hairdryer.

At the back of the shop, the barber pulls out a cover for protecting clothes from hair. Suddenly out of the doorway behind the barber, the man from the van appears, grabs the barber, covers his mouth before struggling with him. While they are seen struggling in the background, Agent 327 is completely oblivious as he tries to put the stand together.

Again, another piece of humour, showing more bumbling around by Agent 327, this time not in sight of anyone, showing it as a deep-rooted character trait.

The van man picks up the cover from the counter, as he does the barber can be partially seen lying on the floor behind the counter.

After the attack on the barber, the van man (Boris) is shown to be a nasty man who is intent on getting to his target by any means necessary. At this point, it is unclear if the barber is dead or not, only that he is lying on the floor.

The van man walks towards Agent 327 in the chair, puts the cover on Agent 327 just like a barber would have done. Initially, Agent 327 doesn't notice it's not the barber as he is looking at the wonky stand he put back together (the wrong way round). He asks for a haircut then notices it is the van man, he shouts out 'Boris', just as he starts being strangled with the cover. Agent 327 gets out of the stranglehold by pulling the chair release and flipping backwards, he pulls his gun out and points it at Boris, who immediately hits it out of his hand. The gun slides across the unit and stops by a hairdryer.

Agent 327 and Boris continue fighting, during the fight they each use various barber's instruments, such as hairspray, tongs and a cutthroat knife. During the fight Agent 327, hits his face into a bust, which opens a flap on the top of the bust's head to reveal some hidden buttons. This is what he has been searching for but can't do anything while he is still fighting.

The fight continues with them both trading blows until Boris gets the upper hand and pushes Agent 327 into the counter, where he gets above him, picks up the trimmer, turns it on and starts forcing it towards Agent 327's eye. Agent 327 sees the gun in the corner of his eye and starts trying to grab it but can't reach, instead, he manages to get the cord of the hairdryer and pulls it towards himself. With the hairdryer in hand, he turns it on and blows it in the face of Boris, who stops for a second, he smacks Boris in the face with it, twice, which knocks Boris out.

With Boris slumped in the chair unconscious, Agent 327 stretches his back which crunches and checks Boris' pockets, only to find a photo of himself with '£100,000 Alive' written on it.

Another touch of humour, with Agent 327 stretching his back and it crunching.

Suddenly a noise from across the room attracts Agent 327's attention. He sees the barber swaying across the room, battered and bruised, towards the bust, which he opens and presses a button. Suddenly, the floor around the chair that Agent 327 and Boris are on starts descending. As they descend, the hairdryer, with the cord plugged into the bottom of the chair, falls with them along with the can of hairspray.

Agent 327 tries to use his radio in his wristwatch, but it was broken during the fight. As the lift comes to a halt, Agent 327 finds himself in a darkened room with a light in the far corner. Under the light is a man strapped to a chair with two men surrounding him, he is shouting at them to stop as one of them is about to use a surgical saw on his head. The noise of the lift unexpectedly coming down stops them for a second as they look around to see what is happening. We see a hand with long nails in the darkness as an unseen voice shouts at them to continue.

The camera shows a female character with long nails and an elaborate Far Eastern costume in the shadows, who mentions Agent 327 by his codename before ordering her henchmen to capture him. As half a dozen henchman slowly and carefully walk towards Agent 327, he notices the hairdryer sparking slightly and the hairspray lying on Boris' lap. He has an idea and picks them both up and uses them together to form a flamethrower, which he fires towards the approaching henchmen. As he is swinging the flamethrower towards the henchmen and the camera, the screen gets engulfed in flame and the film fades out.

Conclusion

After viewing the video and deciding on using it for the analysis, it looked like a short introduction to something much bigger. I had no knowledge of the wider context and rich history of the character from the almost 60 years since the comic started. There is plenty of history and material from the comics. Even before I found the official website and read about the plan to make a full-length movie, I thought it felt like a trailer or a James Bond pre-credits sequence, except with comedic elements.

The character and the style of the story are definitely inspired by James Bond, such as the agent's name and the villains/lair/torture aspects of the film, and in particular the music.

We see two sides to Agent 327 throughout the film, his actions change from confident and professional to indecisive and confused. The way he tackles Boris during their fight followed by the henchmen at the end, to dropping the picture frame and knocking over the trimmer stand of the little man and not being able to put either one back in their place properly. It shows he is human but also very well trained.

When we first see the barber, he seems very subdued and almost slightly sedated or half asleep. There is also a scar going over the left side of his head from the top towards the back. It may be as simple as the barber is bored and can't be bothered or maybe his scar has something to do

with his behaviour. Later in the film we see all the henchmen in the lair have the same scar and the man tied up in the chair is about to be operated on. Is this how the evil lady recruits her people?

Boris is already known to Agent 327 but does not seem to be connected to the others, at least not directly. The evil lady could be responsible for the bounty on Agent 327, which Boris is trying to collect. Would Boris help Agent 327 fight the others if he woke up during it? Could he also become a recruit if he didn't escape too?

The video is a well-made and enjoyable piece of entertainment, which shows off the qualities of Blender and the skills of the production team. For a Dutch company to use a locally created character seems like a sensible pairing. I would be interested in watching a full feature film if it was ever completed.

References

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Doug goes on an adventure

By

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The sun shines brightly in through the window, in the distance the sky is overcast.

On the sunlit floor by the window lies a black and white dog, half asleep.

DOG (V.O.)
I'm Doug, this is my life.
Sitting in the sun and sleeping.

In the background, a television is on showing a natural history programme. The back of a man can be seen sitting on the settee facing the tv.

DOUG (V.O.)
That's Brian, he thinks he's the boss, but we all know the truth.

The programme finishes and Brian's phone starts to ring. Brian answers it.

BRIAN
Hi Jill..yes, I'm just about to leave.

The other side of the conversation can't be heard.

BRIAN
Yes, once we have finished at the vet I will meet you at the park to take Doug for a walk. Okay, bye.

Brian stands up and walks to the door, puts his coat on and calls Doug. He takes the lead off the hook.

BRIAN
Come on Doug, let's go.

Doug looks at Brian from the comfort of the sun-soaked floor.

DOUG (V.O.)
I'm not going. Last time I went I didn't like it.

Brian crouches down, beckoning Doug over to him.

BRIAN
Come on Doug, we'll see Jill and go for a great walk. I'll give you some treats if you are a good boy.

Doug reluctantly gets up and walks over to Brian who puts the lead on him, opens the door and they walk out.

2

INT. - VETS OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON SAME DAY

2

Brian and Doug enter the waiting room of the vet's office, Doug is on his lead. It is very busy as Brian snakes his way up to the counter.

BRIAN

Hello, I brought Doug for his
checkup and inoculation.

RECEPTIONIST

Okay...yes I see Doug on the
list. Please take a seat, someone
will be with you soon.

Brian finds a seat and sits down. Doug sits down next to him.

BRIAN

(Soothingly)

Not long Doug, then we'll be in
the park. You can run around and
play.

After waiting for a few minutes a nurse appears.

NURSE

Doug! You are next.
(Looking around and calling)

BRIAN

Yes, here. I'm coming.
(Waving his arm in the air
to get the nurse's
attention)

3

INT. VETS EXAM ROOM

3

Brian brings Doug to the exam room and puts Doug on the table and takes his lead off. The vet examines Doug, talking under his breath as he does it.

VET

Nurse, can I have the syringe,
please?

The nurse passes the syringe to the Vet. Doug looks in horror at the syringe and starts quivering. The door opens and Doug makes a run for it.

BRIAN

Doug! Come back!

VET

Not again! Nurse get after him.
He can't get far.

Doug runs out of the room and down the corridor towards the back of the building. He runs through an open door at the rear.

4 EXT. REAR OF VETS 4

Doug runs out and looks for an escape. He sees a hole in the fence and dives through it.

5 EXT. ROAD AT REAR OF VETS 5

Doug runs up the road. Behind him, he can hear voices and someone trying to open the gate. He keeps running and running, hoping to get home. He starts getting tired and sees an alleyway so decides to run up it to hide.

6 EXT. ALLEYWAY - MIDDLE OF NOWHERE 6

As Doug goes around the corner into the alleyway he sees a shimmering window floating above the ground, through it he sees a nice green place with trees and the sun. He runs through, as the place looks nice and sunny.

7 EXT. LARGE FOREST OPENING 7

Doug finds himself in a nice large opening with green grass all around. It is very quiet, so Doug has a lie down. He is awoken by a loud roaring noise, which scares him. He runs into the forest.

8 EXT. FOREST 8

Doug walks through the thick undergrowth looking for somewhere better to sleep. He finds a cave and goes in.

9 INT. DARK CAVE 9

Doug sits behind a small rock just in the entrance, so he can't be seen from outside. Suddenly he hears a growl, looks further into the cave to see five sets of eyes open and move towards him. As they come closer to Doug, sniffing the air, Doug can see giant cats with two long front teeth, licking their lips as they slowly move forward.

Doug realises he needs to get out of there, so he starts running.

10 EXT. FOREST 10

He runs through the forest back the way he came, the undergrowth is thick, which doesn't stop him but slows down the giant cats. he needs to get back to the window.

11

EXT. FOREST OPENING

11

Doug comes into the opening and can see the window in the distance, now he is out of the undergrowth he can really run. As he runs away from the undergrowth he can hear the noise of the cats in the distance, they're not too far behind. With a big gap between him and the tree line, the cats appear and continue running after him.

Doug has to keep going as fast as he can towards the window. As he is getting closer to the window, he looks behind to see the cats are gaining on him.

Suddenly he can hear a lot of noise from his right, he looks over to see a lot of giant hairy things, also with long teeth, but also really long noses, running towards the area between him and the window.

All the animals are getting closer to Doug and the window starts fading in and out.

Doug doesn't know if he will make it before he gets caught by the other animals.

As Doug gets near to the window, it continues fading in and out. Doug closes his eyes and jumps towards the window...