

Document of Critical Reflection

Major Project – ADGD7008

‘Ground Worms’



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WORD COUNT: 2,016

Introduction

The project 'Ground Worms' was a collaborative effort between me and two team members, with each of us assigned different roles based on our strengths. The roles assigned to me were asset collecting, compositing, colour correction and sound design. As the project progressed over the summer, I encountered various challenges, including managing last-minute deliveries and technical issues. Despite this, I maintained strong personal time management and organisation, which helped me complete my assigned tasks under tight deadlines. This critical reflection will explore my role within the team, the processes I implemented and how my contributions impacted the overall project. By looking at both the successes and challenges, I aim to analyse how I met the goals outlined in my Document of Intent, while also reflecting on the lessons I have learned and how this experience will shape future collaborations in my career.

Roles and Responsibilities

During the initial phase of the project everyone was assigned roles in which they were the strongest in. For me, this was asset collecting, compositing, colour and sound. Dan was the strongest animator of us all, so he took on the lead animator role whilst Igor was tasked with designing the backgrounds. These roles were clearly outlined in the Document of Intent, since I have a strong post-production background, my focus was on enhancing the visual and auditory elements of the animation.

A role in Maya was never assigned to me, although I took on a standby role to assist Dan if he had any issues. However, as Dan handled the animation smoothly, he did not have any issues he needed me to help with, my assistance in Maya was not required. This allowed me to dedicate my time to the main roles I was assigned.

on May 8th, two days before the Pre-Production assignment deadline, one of the team members requested that I retrieve the audio from the previous animatic created, I needed him to clarify whether this would be from a Maya or Premiere Pro project, as at the time I was staying at my grandad's house after the recent passing of my grandmother. Unfortunately, the computer available to me that night was not powerful enough to download and run Maya, which could have been an issue if the audio were from a Maya project, but it was from a Premiere Pro project, so I was able to extract the audio with no issues. This was the only time whilst working with this team that I had mentioned I did not have access to Maya. After that night, I had my mother drop off my MacBook Pro to my granddad's house so I could be on standby just in case my help on Maya was required, but I was not needed. I was initially worried at the beginning of this project as the sudden

passing of my grandmother had demotivated me entirely, not just within my university projects but within every aspect of my personal life. I found that starting this project when I did, distracted me from grieving, which then sparked motivation within me.

The Process

Each of the roles I was assigned required careful planning and technical execution. For compositing, I worked primarily within Premiere Pro, although After Effects would have been better suited for certain tasks like keyframing and added animation layers. Frequent crashes when After Effects was being used alongside Premiere Pro forced me to adjust my workflow. I then decided to handle the keyframing directly in Premiere Pro to avoid any more crashes. Whilst this was slightly more time-consuming it helped me avoid any loss in progress, which was essential. As the compositor, I was responsible for bringing together all the assets and bringing the animation to life. There is stuff I could have improved on but given tight time constraints I believe I did a decent job.

The team agreed on the cartoon aesthetic for the final edit. After analysing different kid-friendly animations that I grew up watching, I made the decision to use a bright and saturated palette similar to what I had shown my teammates in our last assignment. I believe the colour was consistent across the scenes, ensuring the backgrounds and the characters matched the tone.

During the sound design process, I collected multiple third-party assets, but I also recorded a significant portion of the audio myself, including Foley for environmental sound and voicing the worm characters, making certain moments during the animation more impactful.

For each process, I implemented a balance between creative choices and technical precision. Despite facing setbacks, such as late delivery of backgrounds and the need to work through the night before the final deadline, my planning ahead, especially in sound and colour, allowed me to execute the compositing and final edit efficiently.

Successes and Strengths

One of my key strengths throughout this project was my ability to manage time effectively and stay organised. Particularly when facing tight deadlines and unexpected setbacks. From the beginning I established a clear workflow by organising my assets into folders on my MacBook and then later on into folders within Premiere Pro to streamline the

compositing process. This helped me stay on track, especially when the project grew more complex as we got closer to the deadline. I also set daily reminders and alarms to keep myself accountable, which allowed me to tackle my tasks efficiently without getting overwhelmed.

Another significant strength was my proactive approach to sound and colour. When working in a team, you must remember other members may have issues on their end that could set them back a few hours or even days. I realised this early on and knew that my roles were mainly going to be towards the end of the assignment, so I worked on these elements well in advance in case any hiccups occurred. I spent weeks collecting sound effects, recording Foley, creating colour presets and editing the audio, so when the final animations were uploaded for me, I could focus primarily on compositing and final touches. This forward thinking allowed me to complete the final edit overnight, as I had only received the scenes the evening before the deadline.

Finally, my work in sound design was successful. Looking back, there are some things that I would change, but overall, what I wanted to accomplish was accomplished. I not only gathered third party sound effects, but also recorded my own Foley, including voicing the worms. Using Adobe Audition and Premiere Pro, I adjusted the pitch and tones to suit the animation's cartoony feel. The sound effects helped bring the scenes to life and contributed to a more immersive experience for the viewer.

Challenges and Weaknesses

Despite a lot of things going well for me, I faced several challenges throughout the project that highlighted areas for improvement. One of the most significant challenges was managing the unpredictable timing of the finished animation delivery. Due to the backgrounds of the animation not being sent over to Dan in a timely manner, I received the scenes that Dan had rendered on the evening before the deadline, with the first of the scenes coming in at around 9:30pm and then the rest at 11:30pm. 9:30pm the night before the deadline was already quite late, but through no fault of Dan, due to the export settings changing from PNGs to TIFFs, Dan had to convert the last few scenes into MP4's himself and upload for me to download as time was not on our side. While I was able to stay up through the night and complete the final edit, the timing put immense pressure on my compositing process, leaving little room for refining the smaller details. Though I had anticipated some delays and prepared in advance, this last-minute rush significantly affected the overall workflow.

A key weakness that emerged during this phase was my tendency to overlook minute details under pressure. One example was the audio levels of certain sound effects, which I feel could have been more polished. With the tight turnaround, I did not have time to balance all the sound elements or perfect the mixing, and this is something I wish I had refined further. In hindsight, allocating more time towards perfecting the sound mix even in the later stages would have improved the overall quality of the final product.

Another issue I encountered was navigating technical issues with the software. Premiere Pro and After Effects frequently crashed when used together, causing me to lose progress multiple times. This forced me to abandon After Effects for the keyframing tasks. Even though it would have been a better tool for some of the more complex animations, while I adapted to using Premiere Pro for everything, it resulted in some compromises on workflow efficiency and in turn took more time to complete the compositing. My decision to stick with Premiere Pro helped avoid further crashes, but it did slow me down, particularly when keyframing and creating camera movements. This was a challenge I was not fully prepared for and could have managed better with more frequent saving and backup protocols.

One personal weakness was in team communication and coordination, although we used WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams for group discussions, the remote nature of the project, especially with one team member relocating to London, made communication inconsistent at times. Due to this relocation, the team member was not present during any of our presentations. I occasionally felt unsure of when I would receive the final animations, and the lack of face-to-face meetings made it harder to clarify expectations. As previously mentioned, on May 8th during the previous assignment when I was asked to retrieve audio from an older animatic while staying at my granddad's, I could not fully assist due to technical limitations. Whilst the situation was out of my control, it revealed how important consistent communication is when working remotely. I could have been more proactive in seeking updates and better coordinated the handoff of assets to avoid some of the issues we faced nearer the deadline.

Another challenge I had was related to accessibility and delays in my side of the asset uploads. Due to being away for a few days, I was unable to upload the Maya assets I collected as the Wi-Fi would not work. This delay meant the assets were uploaded to One Drive in late July, despite aiming for an earlier upload. Whilst I ensured the assets were uploaded as soon as I returned, this shortened the time the animators had to integrate them into scenes to roughly 5 weeks instead of closer to 6 weeks. Once the assets were uploaded, I had not heard from the team despite messaging a few times.

Finally, stress management became a challenge as the deadline approached. Staying up all night to finish the edit and prepare for the presentation took a toll on my focus and energy. Although I managed to complete the project on time, working under such high pressure made it difficult to give the final touches the attention they deserved. Balancing the stress of last-minute work while maintaining the highest level of quality is something I aim to improve in future projects. In the future, I plan to work on staying calm under pressure, better managing time for final refinements and communicating earlier with team members about delays or issues.

Conclusion

Overall, my experience working on 'Ground Worms' with two team members has been both rewarding and educational. Whilst I successfully managed my roles in compositing, colour correction, sound design and asset collecting, I demonstrated strong time management and adaptability. The project also highlighted areas for growth, challenges with late animation delivery, technical difficulties and the last-minute pressure tested my ability to stay focused and deliver quality results. Despite the hurdles, I am proud of the work I accomplished and the lessons I learned about refining details, improving communication, and managing stress, which will be invaluable in future collaborative projects. This experience has not only strengthened my technical skills but also given me greater insight into effective teamwork and project management, which I will carry forward into my career.

