



The jerky, stylised movement of the golden figure was created by manipulating the speed of transitions between character poses

Theros is constructed around oppressive rhythms, abstract shapes and loosely represented figures

SHOWREEL



THEROS BY GEORGIOS CHEROUVIM

Georgios Cherouvim uses semi-abstract visuals and muscular animation in this pessimistic, yet impressive portrait of the human condition

THE PITCH

SYNOPSIS

An oppressively physical portrait of how the building of human civilisation rips itself and the Earth apart

LOOK OUT FOR

- 0:09 The giant statue comes into view
- 0:40 Camera pans back to reveal hundreds of workers
- 0:59 The wonderful sky, possibly inspired by another short film, *Loop*
- 1:03 A sudden change of colour and texture
- 1:48 The rising city
- 2:00 Power of 10 shot as the screaming face of the planet is revealed

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- *Chrysalide* (Damien Serban and Yann Bertrand)
- *Grau* (Robert Seidel)
- *Loop* (Julian Rancoeur)

Abstract animation is a phrase to make many people shudder, conjuring up monstrosities like the *Worker and Parasite* cartoon glimpsed in a *Simpsons* episode. For Georgios Cherouvim, the medium frees the imagination, and inspired him to create muscular animation for a film revealing human progress as a passage of aggression and mutilation. It's heavy and oppressive, yet thrilling to watch.

"After five years of using 3D software, I'm not easily impressed by photorealism," says a forthright Cherouvim. "Realism isn't important to tell a story and visualise an idea. Why limit yourself to the real-world look? One of my initial aims was to emphasise the artistic side, creating a stylised animation."

Theros was Cherouvim's third-year major project during his computer animation course at the NCCA of Bournemouth University. Did the course influence his style? "I can't say that, but it definitely gave me opportunities. Before I joined the course, I had no artistic background. From life-drawing sessions, visits to galleries, library resources and tutors, I realised there were all these non-technical approaches I needed to try, in order to make an image or an animation more interesting."

Beyond its imaginative appeal, the stylised animation of *Theros* has practical advantages: "The film's subject would have been too hard to express in photorealism. I wanted to avoid complex scenes, objects and character rigs. Because I didn't

have to worry about high-res models, or rigs and skinning which would be hard to set up, I could create many different sets and figures. However, that didn't make the modelling easier, as everything had to look clean and consistent to create a unified result."

The animation in *The Wall* was an obvious influence on Cherouvim's film. "I saw it years ago, and what impressed me was its rhythmic and repetitive animation. I wanted an animation where sound and picture merged to create something more powerful. I could have had a bit of variety in the workers' models or their animation but, in the end, I chose to make them identical, acting like a bigger entity. This helped preserve the beat through the piece. I wanted a soundtrack with a clear beat, yet one that also had noisy digital sounds. Thankfully, my brother composed and engineered a piece on top of my edited animatic, which enhanced the atmosphere and helped unify the piece."

ALL IN THE CURVES

The film begins with an image of a golden giant half-buried in sand. (According to Cherouvim, it represents humanity in its purest form.) "While I was working on the animatic for the opening, I started planning the character's key poses with stepped animation curves which made the figure jump from one pose to another. I found doing that created a nice contrast between him and the smooth movement of the worker in the



RESUME

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CAREER HISTORY

- 2002-2003
BA (Hons) Computer Animation and Visualisation, National Centre of Computer Animation, Media School of Bournemouth University
- 2003-2004
PAL leader (Peer Assistant for Learning), giving a supporting lecture to the first year students of the BA Computer animation and Visualisation course.
- 2005
Junior TD on *X-Men 3* at MPC, London

foreground. I looked for a method of animating the character like that in a more polished way."

Cherouvim tried five different ways to achieve a satisfactory result, but most looked like unfinished animation. "The way it was achieved in the end was to set up all the poses with smooth animation curves that were almost evenly timed. Then I connected my own time variable to the curves, so I could change the animation speed, adding another layer of control. It was like scratching a turntable and listening to a track at various speeds, even backwards."

SHAKING IT UP

A shot of machinery cutting the ground was also hard to build. "It took more than five time-consuming attempts to set it up efficiently, so it was easy to tweak and fast to render. In some cases, I spent days perfecting effects not noticeable in the final result. Duplicating objects, especially the workers in the first shots, was something that took a lot of research. I used Particle Instances extensively, as they were the most efficient way to duplicate objects in *Maya*. On the other hand, it made the particles hard to control and required a set of tools and MEL scripts, so I could place and orient each instanced object and tile in each scene."

Throughout the film, there's dust, debris, drops and splashes of blood, and harsh light. "The final look was created in postproduction using *Shake*," explains Cherouvim. "The first step was to darken the borders of the frame and lighten the area of interest a bit, to create depth and guide the viewer's eye. Most textures are photos taken from various surfaces; others are hand-painted images. After I processed them a bit, I put them on top of the beauty pass, using various blending functions. The idea was to end up with a 2D/3D look, rather than just pure 3D.

In the middle of the production, I decided not to use textures at all for the 3D models. Most of the shaders are simple Blinns and Lamberts, so I needed to add the extra detail in post. To be honest, I was planning to add more 2D effects and textures, especially for the last sequence, but I ran out of time because of the deadline."

Still, with Cherouvim keen to make more 'personal' animation in future, it sounds like a great starting point for his next film. ●

WATCH THE MOVIE

You can see *Theros* on Georgios Cherouvim's website at www.ch3.gr under 'animation'.

"AFTER 5 YEARS OF USING 3D SOFTWARE, I CAN SAY THAT I'M NOT EASILY IMPRESSED BY PHOTOREALISM."

GEORGIOS CHEROUVIM, CREATOR OF THEROS

FACT FILE

- **Title:** *Theros*
- **Running time:** 2 minutes, 38 seconds
- **Budget:** N/A (made on college equipment)
- **Funding sources:** National Centre of Computer Animation, Bournemouth
- **Time taken:** 8 months
- **Software used:** *Maya*, *Mental Ray*, *Photoshop*, *Premiere* and various freeware programs (including *Cygin* and *VirtualDub*)
- **Hardware used:** Dell Intel Dual Pentium 4 and AMD Pentium 3 1.5GHz PCs
- **Public screenings:** Global Student Animation Awards

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