



# Adapting “Tickle Fickle” Comic Strip to an Animated Short Film

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**Abstract.** One medium that is widely available in society is comics. McCloud (2006) reveals that comics are pictures that are arranged sequentially so that they can provide a specific context and purpose. This term is called juxtaposition, similar to making storyboards used in film production. Adapting from a comic, comic panels can easily transform to storyboards in the pre-production process. The exciting thing is that many of the films that have been released have been adapted based on comics that have been released before. Therefore, the researcher will conduct a case study that occurs in an original work entitled Tickle Fickle by Arkala Studio. “Tickle Fickle” itself is a comic with a short panel that tells about the young adult’s problems. This research uses qualitative method through research-creation methodology. With this research, it is hoped the authors can explain better the factors that influence the transfer of the medium from comics to animation film.

**Keywords:** Comic, Animation, Adaptation.

## 1 Introduction

Throughout the years, comic books existed in someone’s life at one particular moment. It’s not very uncommon for film industries to make adaptation films or even video games, from comic books. It was all started from comic strips in newspapers like Peanuts (Snoopy) and Garfield in the 1950's. After that, it raised more popularity, especially for children with superhero themes, like Popeye, Superman, and Spiderman. Range of audience didn’t really stop only for children, it raised popularity since Spiderman in 2002, an adaptation film from the comic book with the same name, Spiderman in 1977. From there, it became very worldwide to make an adaptation film based on comics.

In the book entitled “Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels”, McCloud [1] explained that there’s a juxtaposition concept that comics are pictures that are arranged sequentially so that they can provide a specific context and purpose. Within the adaptation of films, Annunziantio [2] also said literary sources

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such as picture books can deliver not only different approach, but capable of offer different values and feelings to the audience. Regarding profit margins, Kim [3] stated that adaptations from comic books and toy lines which were produced as sequels are highly profitable at the worldwide box office.

There are several studies that discuss film adaptations from comics or picture books. In “A Child’s Eye View of Where the Wild Things Are: Lessons from Spike Jonze’s Film Adaptation of Maurice Sendak’s Picture Book” (2013), Annunziantio stated some of children books that meant for child, can be adapted to a film that meant for adults. An adaptation might serve different approach and also change target audience. In “Dynamic drawings and dilated time: framing in comics and film” Rowe [4] stated that comic panels are a storyboard for cinema production, without film crew have to make storyboard by themselves. There are various researches about comic books adaptation and the results also very various, depending on what the result of its film adaptation it selves.

This article going to give detail process of making an adaptation from one of “Tickle Fickle”, a comic strip that revolves around struggles being a young-adult, to a short animation film. Our team picked one of “Tickle Fickle” chapters and created a short animation from that chapter. The production of this short animation uses a 3D software Maya and Blender, but it is rendered in 2D animation style, and floating dialogue boxes visual effect, to convey comical feeling. This approach was chosen because the creator of “Tickle Fickle” does not want to leave the comical elements in the animation adaptation. The adaptation of this was a Project Based Learning (PBL) curriculum from Multimedia Nusantara Polytechnic (MNP), where students require to gain experience work with professional creative industry, in this case with Arkala Studio, also preparing students’ portfolio before internship on the 7th/8th semester. There are 4 subjects that were involved with PBL, which are 3D Character Animation 1, Organic Modeling, Rigging for Animator, and Acting in Animation.

This research paper uses qualitative method through research-creation method. This method was chosen because the research-creation method will help us to explain in detail, through and through, the work process of pre-production, production, and post-production animation that has already been done. This article will focus on similarities between 3 Acts Structures of comic and animation. Both acts serve three stages that consist of Beginning, Middle, and End. Both serves same and functioning storytelling, but comics are meant to be read, while animations are meant to be watch. Pacing and timing needed to be adjust when adapting to animation that’s not shown in comic panels. We hope this research would result in a better understanding of designing an animated film from a comic adaptation. This articles will also focus on the differences between comic panels and animation visual, where some scenes need to be adjusted so the storyline doesn’t change.

## 2 Methodology

This article is using qualitative method and proceeds with research-creation method. These methods were chosen because both suggest a perspective of resistance and failure

as productive and constitutive of possibilities of coming to know, both for the research subjects and ultimately for the authors in their orientation to research inquiry, as mentioned by Georgis & Matthews [5].

The data will be collected by producing a short animation adaptation of the “Tickle Fickle” comic strip. The process includes:

1. Pre-production preparation of style, director’s treatment, and everything that needed with still conveying comical visuals.
2. Production methods, such as using software, adding visual effects, and rendering style setting.
3. Post-production, the launching of the short animation.

## 2.1 Tickle Fickle Original Comic

Arkala Studio has been an independent animation studio since 2016 and made “Tickle Fickle” in late 2019, published publically in 2020. Arkala Studio chose Tapas, an online platform for digital comics based in South Korea. After receiving positive reviews on Tapas, “Tickle Fickle” was also published on Webtoon— a Japanese online digital comic platform— and made an Instagram account to pursue a wider audience.

“Tickle Fickle” consists of daily stories that revolves around the main protagonist, Cody— the humanoid-bird character living in a humanoid-bird society called Birbtown. The creators of “Tickle Fickle” named Birbtown after the internet slang of bird, which is “birb”. Every chapter shows perspective through a passive and timid Cody, to an extreme social society where somehow Cody always got stuck in the middle. “Tickle Fickle” is shown to has limited color, only colored one or two things that highlight the story of the current chapter. The creators of “Tickle Fickle” said it was done on purpose to show that Cody is a non-dominant character that lives in a grey area of life, that he doesn’t like conflict and is always trying to protect the peace, also trying to not be dominant. Though actively passive, he has a lot of inner thoughts and tends to overthink things.

MNP partnered up with Arkala for PBL collaboration and they chose one of the chapters that showed the core characteristic of Cody, titled “Awake”, consisted of 9 panels. This chapter shows how Cody keeps getting reminded of his social life, comparing his life progress and achievements with his friends and family. At the end of the panel, he had a revelation that everyone is different and has different pace when it comes to life.



Fig. 1. Chapter "Awake" from "Tickle Fickle" (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

### 3 Result

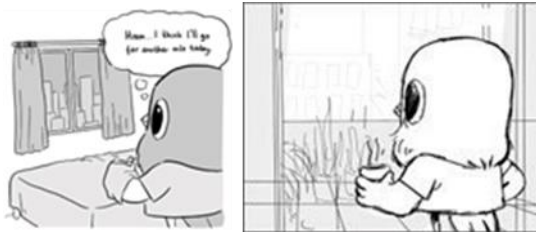
There's a significant similarity when it comes to comic and animation, they both used 3 Act structures. This 3 Acts structure consisted of: (1) Act 1: The beginning, where the it set up context; (2) Act 2: Middle, where the protagonist attempt to reach their goal of encountering conflict; (3) Act 3: End, gives the resolution of the conflict. The differences between comic and animation, in comic the readers determine their own pace of reading, while in animation it has its own duration from the very beginning. Their differences are also what seems to be achievable in the comic form. Unfortunately, in animation it needs a lot of adjustment if we want to do exactly like in the comic panels, or in extreme cases, even make major changes so the we only focus on the story while changing the visual.

#### 3.1 Pre-Production

Pre-production process of the "Tickle Fickle" animation adaptation started with discussion of what kind of visuals the creators from Arkala Studio— Ervan Solihin, Mirelle Tan, and Yulio Darmawan— wanted to achieve. We brainstormed together and decided to go for 2D animation visual style. Since 2D animation visual style, not only expensive and time-consuming, the production used 3D software— Maya, Adobe After Effects for visual effects, and Adobe Premiere for finishing. From MNP, students who was involved in this project included Eldwin Immanuel Sumampow, who was in his 3rd semester of college, Billy Jonathan as lab assistant and instructor, Yohanes Merci W. as Producer and 3D Animation lecturer, and Sella Putri Arby as Acting in Animation lecturer.

After brainstorming, we take the chapter of the "Tickle Fickle" comic strip into animatic storyboard, aiming to calculate the duration of this short animation. Not only to calculate the duration, we also needed to break down which parts were needed to be changed in terms of production and character modeling. The changes were:

1. In the First shot, where Cody in the comic book is shown to have his jacket on his arm, but we decided to change it to him holding a cup of hot coffee due to a technical issue for character’s modeling. Cody’s view also changed, from showing a bed and window to a balcony view to shown more of the city landscape.



**Fig. 2.** First panel from comic strip and first shot from storyboard (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

2. We added extra two shots from the last page of the comic strip to gives more focus and emotional meaning. In total, the comic only has 9 pages, while the total shots on the storyboard have 11. Cody’s position and blocking also changed after some discussion to keep Cody’s original walking track to prevent changing and adding a camera view. Also, the changes from Cody’s moving a leaf to let the snail walk, to give the snail a leaf to eat.



**Fig. 3.** 8th-9th panel of chapter "Awake" from “Tickle Fickle” (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)



Fig. 4. 9th-11th shots from animating storyboard (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

### 3.2 Production

The First stage of the production process, is 3D modeling characters and environment in the Organic Modeling class. After Arkala Studio listed characters and objects that needed to be modeled, we began to model using 3D software, Maya. This chapter is shown to have four different characters, which are:

- 1. Cody

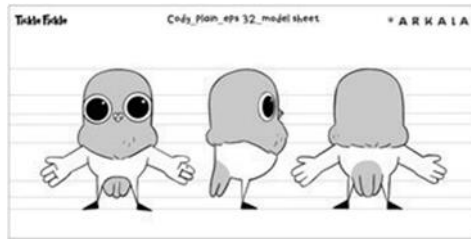


Fig. 5. T-Pose of character Cody (Courtesy of Arkala Studio)

- 2. Ladybug

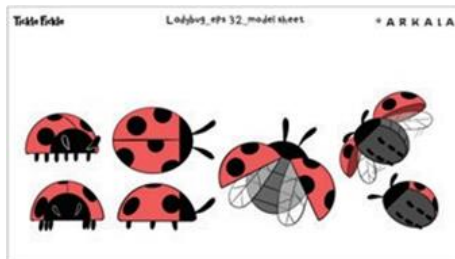


Fig. 6. Different pose and angles of character Ladybug (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

## 3. Bee

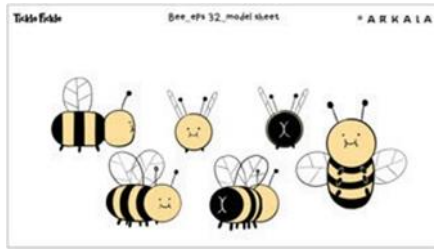


Fig. 7. Different angles of character Bee (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

## 4. Snail

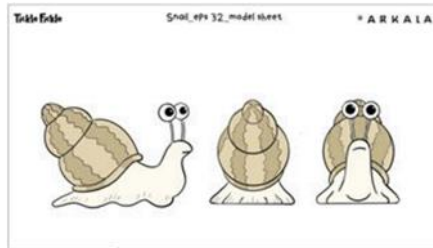


Fig. 8. Different angles of character Snail (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

Environment modeling is next, and we need a list and visual references for the environment 3D model, which are:

## 1. Cody's Room



Fig. 9. Cody's room layout and views (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

## 2. Balcony



Fig. 10. Cody's balcony (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

### 3. Jogging Track

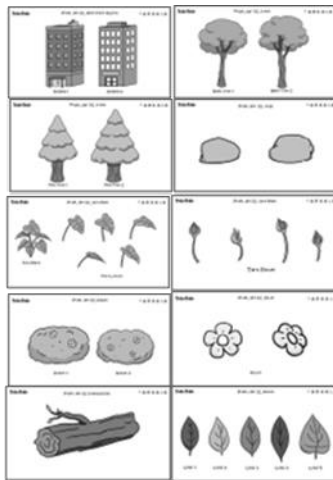


**Fig. 11.** Jogging track on Cody’s living area (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

### 4. Objects



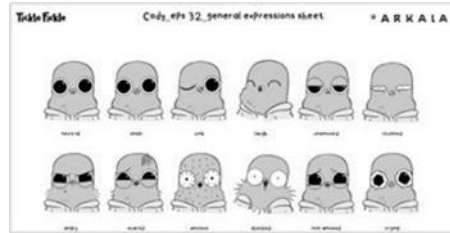
**Fig. 12.** Objects inside Cody’s room (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)



**Fig. 13.** Different objects for outdoor environment (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

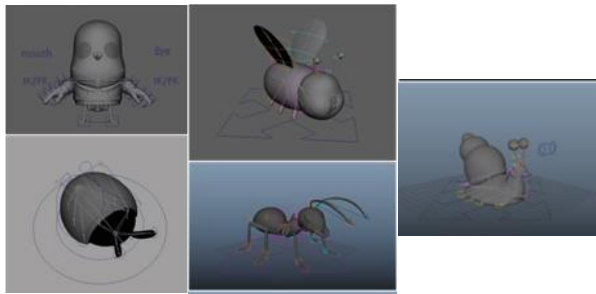
After modeling, it is required to give 3D model some bones that called rigging. Prior to rigging, rigger need an expression sheet to adjust movements and bone placement to pursue the flexibility of the character’s emotional range. However, in “Awake” chapter, Cody does not show much of an expression.





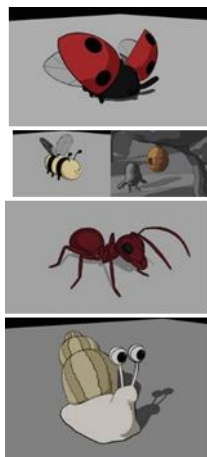
**Fig. 14.** Cody’s expression sheets (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio)

In total, there are five characters that need to be rigged: Cody, Ladybug, Bee, Ants, and Snails.



**Fig. 15.** Rig for characters (Source: courtesy of MNP)

Every model has different body movements; this is making the rigging a little bit tricky. After several researches and observations in Rigging in Animator class, rigging process was finally done. Production continues to add textures that give several 3D models a skin or color. Several characters needed extra skin to show their vibrant colors just like in its comic panels. Those characters are Ladybug, Bee, Bee House, Ant, and Snail.



**Fig. 16.** Textures for characters (Souce: courtesy of MNP)

In Acting and Animation class, students must act upon Cody's character to make animation movements and blocking references. The acting process helps animators to know which joint of the controller needs to be moves, to make movements won't look lifeless, for 3D Character Animation class.



**Fig. 17.** Eldwin acting for animation reference (Source: courtesy of MNP)

Using the reference from “Acting in Animation” video reference, our team finally finished the animation. Regarding the duration of animation adaptation, we found that it takes 5-10 minutes to finish one chapter of a comic that has 20-35 pages. It takes around 3.75 seconds per page, and approximately 0.45 seconds per panel. This duration of reading a comic book was researched in order to decide the duration of “Tickle Fickle” animation adaptation, even though the speed of reading and speed of a film was completely different, but at the very least, we figured the animation duration based on that.

### 3.3 Post-Production

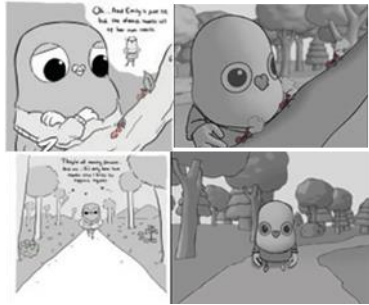
This episode will be rendered in Maya using Arnold Renderer. The rendering process took longer time than expected. Arkala Studio will handle the output from render. The post-production phase consists of online editing and final mixing. The “Tickle Fickle” animated will be premiered in MNP Fest in 2024.

## 4 Discussion

When it comes to the origin of “Tickle Fickle”, the creators said a lot of young-adults highly inspired the character Cody to adults in early 30’s, who keep having inner struggles and, most of the time, not really sure of what they need to do with their lives. “Tickle Fickle” also intended to show how ordinary people with routines, jobs, family, friendships, etc. spend most of their daily lives. The Creators chose “Awake” chapter because it represents the core struggle of being an ordinary person who tends to compare themselves with others, which sometimes do more harm than good. In terms of productions, we found it interesting that comic story structure is similar to animation story structure, which consists of 3-Act story structures. During the production, we made some trials and errors for duration and timing during the production. It’s a bit

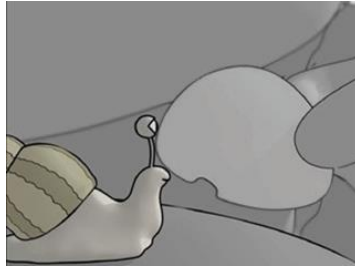
tricky translating comic strip reading-duration to animation duration, where pacing is very crucial to give in depth emotions we’re trying to convey.

Although comic adaptation allowed us to make storyboard faster, there are several changes that needs to be done. In this case, the first shot of from the comic needs to be changed to give more perspective of Cody’s living place. Also at the 9th-11th shots changes were made in order to make production pipeline more efficient. We encountered some problems throughout animating this adaptation for Cody character. Cody T-Pose character shows that his legs and arms are smaller than his head. This makes it difficult for animators to explore his movements. In 12 principles of animation, exaggeration is very crucial when it comes to animating, makes Cody’s 3D model is very tricky to achieve this exaggeration for his movements. Since Cody doesn't have the arms and palms to exaggerate his movement, we need to make his whole body moves to give him life-like movements, makes animating progress was very tricky.



**Fig. 18.** Differences need to be made from comic to 3D animation (Source: courtesy of Arkala Studio and MNP)

In the comic strips, Cody shown to crossed his arms, which impossible to achieve for his 3D model, where his arms are way too short to do that. That why we added new movement where Cody observes the ants colony by moving his like in bird-like movements when a bird is interested in something, and his hand is shown to be bent on his side. In the comic panel, Cody shown to put his hands into his jacket, which also difficult to achieve since his arm are short but his hands are big. On these shots, it also shown the difficulties in showing Cody’s expression where he doesn't have eyebrows. In the comic strips, Cody showed expression with his eyelids, which is a bit difficult to achieve for 3D character rig. Changes were also made on the final shot, where we added new extra extreme close-up shot; where in the comic, Cody moves a leaf to give access for the snail to move, whereas in the animating storyboard, it changes to Cody gives the snail a leaf to eat.



**Fig. 19.** Added extreme close-up for the final shot (Source: courtesy of MNP)

## 5 Conclusion

This animation adaptation took us about six months to produce and some extra weeks to finish. The project started after MNP and Arkala Studio agreed on how we envisioned the adaptation in visual aspects. Through meetings and presentations from both parties, some changes need to be made to make this adaptation work, like changes on the first shot and 9th-11th shots. Also, some movements, because of the limitation of Cody's 3D Model. In order to keep the message that needs to be shown, some adjustments were made. Comic and animation story acts are similar, that consist of 3 Acts Structures. Both have Beginning, Middle, and End. Only the differences between the execution are, comic is made to be read and animation is made to be watch. The differences where the reader determine the duration of their own reading based own their own reading speed, while in animation audience follow its timing. For this project, the duration of the animated film was decided by Arkala Studio. They decided to limit the length of this episode to around 45 - 60 seconds. This duration must be tested in the next research in correlation to individual shot duration. Overall, we need to do more research on bringing the comic to animation adaptation with some trials and errors along the way, which ones are working and which are not. The process made us realize there's no exact blueprint for production since things can be added or eliminated depending on their needs.

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