

ANIMATION

WORLD

Vol. 5 No. 10 • MAGAZINE

• January 2001

The Prospects of

2001



Jobs,
Distribution,
the Internet
and more...

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Cover: Airing on shockwave.com, Tim Burton's *Stainboy* is produced by Flinch Studio using Flash animation and is an excellent example of some of the best content the currently be-leaguered Web has to offer. © Shockwave.com.



Editor's Notebook

by Heather Kenyon

What's to look forward to?

During December 1999 most people were either busy worrying about the Y2K bug, planning a memorable way to ring in the new millennium or desperately trying to sell a Web cartoon...things have definitely changed. By December 2000 people were busy worrying about paying their mortgage, planning memorable, but inexpensive, holiday gifts and desperately trying to sell anything, anywhere. In this issue we take a look at the big issues that are facing the industry at this seemingly dark and precipitous time.

Animation has enjoyed almost supernatural booms for over a decade. When television began to fizzle...along came cable...when cable began to fizzle... along came the joys of home video...when home video began to lose its cool...along came the animated feature film rush...when those studios began to dwindle... along came the Internet...now the Internet is seeming to fizzle and our next knight in shining armor is not arriving on the horizon. In fact, he seems to be retreating with all the former saviors as well. While we all know animation is a cyclical industry it is hard to take that with a grain of salt when you are standing in the unemployment line. It is also hard to hear that there are more animation opportunities now than ever before... As Ilene Renee Gannaway states in "Down and

Out in Toon Town," artists are going to have to train and re-train in order to stay competitive in this quickly changing, technology focused world. The number of skills one has just may be the knight in shining armor. From theme parks to gaming, our next issue's topic, artists that were formerly employed in the animation field might need to diversify in order to keep working.

In this issue we are also taking a look at the current number of dot coms that are downsizing and shutting their doors. Like pioneers setting out into the wild, wild west, many didn't realize how long the journey to the promised land was or how dry and inhospitable the climate in between. In "Debris from Dot Com Crash Hits Animators," Michael Hurwicz takes a look at animation on the Internet and how its rise and fall has influenced the careers of several independent animators. We also have a treat in that Eric Oldrin, a Webisode producing veteran, is sharing his insight on why the Internet hasn't yet lived up to all that it is supposed to be. You'll want to read "Finding Lucy," to learn more.

While feature animation releases are always a "cross your fingers and see" affair, 2001 has a full slate of potential hits and disasters. Fearless Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman is taking another stab at predicting the upcoming year's hits and misses. Another very interesting experiment to check out is Joan Kim's "Outside the Bubble:

What the Main Street Papers Say." In an attempt to gage where the general audience stands regarding animated features, we decided to poll the folks writing the movie reviews and news in newspapers all over America. Their answers are more than insightful and reveal we still have a way to go before animation is regarded as merely a storytelling technique and not a kid's only, comedy genre.

Also in our coverage of the year ahead we have paid special attention to Cartoon Forum, an event that is helping to build Europe into a powerful animation force.

Finally, please do not overlook Piotr Dumala's inspiring and thought-provoking essay "The Philosophical Stone of Animation." Fresh from completing his latest tour de force *Crime and Punishment*, Piotr offers us insight as to why he has devoted thousands of his life's hours to creating the masterful animation that we have all come to anticipate in his films.

So, what is there to look forward to? Well, what is going to happen next? Where will the industry shift and turn and where will enterprising artists (like those that created Flinch Studios) turn up next? These are the answers that are worth looking forward to.

Happy New Year to all of you.

Until Next Time,
Heather

editor@awn.com

Another Missing Laugh-O-Gram

I read with interest "A Silent Treasure Chest" (Osmond, 4.2) by Andrew Osmond regarding David Wyatt's findings of the two Laugh-O-Gram cartoons. Great job! In my research for *The Hand Behind the Mouse: The Ub Iwerks Story*, I discovered that there is yet another film that is still missing — *Jack and the Giant Killer*. A lot of folks assume that this is just an alternative title for *Jack and the Beanstalk* but it is in actuality a different Celtic fairy tale — that of a Valiant Tailor (or Brave Little Tailor in Disney parlance). Both feature a protagonist named Jack. Both feature a giant, but there the similarities cease. According to several documents in the Laugh-O-Gram bankruptcy proceedings, both films were completed by the studio and were part of the missing assets (that the litigants wanted back from Pictorial Clubs). So, FYI, there's some fun info!

John Kenworthy

Vampire Hunter D Correction

Fred Patten's story "Vampire Hunter D: The Next Anime Hit in America?" (Patten, 5.9) contains a factual error. The end of the article says:

[Thanks for information on Hideyuki Kikuchi and his *Vampire Hunter D* novels to the Vampire Hunter D Archives website (<http://www.altvampyres.net/vhd/>) run by Kevin Leahy, an American horror fan living in Japan.]

The Vampire Hunter D Archives is not maintained by Kevin Leahy. He is the source of

information on the novels by Mr. Kikuchi and write-ups of Mr. Kikuchi's Talk Live get-togethers. The web site is maintained by me, Cathy Krusberg. The index page (<http://www.altvampyres.net/vhd/>) states, "The Vampire Hunter D Archives are owned by ckberg@ix.netcom.com," and a number of pages at the site use my name and a link to the same e-mail address.

I read your article via a link from Urban Vision's page (<http://www.urban-vision.com/enter.html>). (One of those annoying ones that puts your page inside and keeps the original site URL at the top of the browser. Grr.....)

Cathy Krusberg



Kudos on running the really wonderful, informative "Vampire Hunter D: The Next Anime Hit in America?" (Patten, 5.9) about the new *Vampire Hunter D*. It's one of the first I've read outside of reviews that really says something of substance about the film and gives more than vague information about the North American release.

I did, however, want to mention that author Fred Patten got an attribution wrong in the last paragraph of the article. He credits Kevin Leahy with being the owner of the Vampire Hunter D Archives (<http://www.altvampyres.net/vhd/>), but it's in fact maintained by Cathy Krusberg, an American fan who can be reached at ckberg@ix.netcom.com. I would guess Patten got it wrong after reading the reviews of *the*



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Vampire Hunter D novels that are archived at the site, as they are by Kevin Leahy and used with permission. I hope that clears things up.

Erin Cochran

Editor's Note: Thank you Cathy and Erin for setting us straight! The error has been corrected on the page and I thank you for bringing it to our attention.

Paul Fierlinger

The interview with Paul Fierlinger, "What Price, Independence?" (Kilmer, 4.2), is truly one of the best selected. It is a bit long and sometimes Fierlinger can seem negative, but his frankness and honesty are extremely refreshing.

I can only read so many articles by pros who have succeeded before I begin to shrink.

Reading how "Everything is possible!" when you're having a hard time in this field is not always reassuring.

Even when I disagree with Fierlinger, I like this article as it is casual and savvy, wisely pessimistic and straight up. Also Fierlinger's experiences with communism are interesting.

Thanks,
Marne Manoukian

A Rebuttle

A response to David J. Billings' Letter to the Editor, December 2000: "Really...Is This Necessary?"

Deer Mr.Billings,

i is sooori u did not like my riting. i is also soori four having opynions. i forget sometimes that thinking is wrong and having

opinions is rong in America.

Tanks fer ritin'
Kris Robonson
Ottawa, Kanada

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Bonus HTML Features

Every on-line (HTML) issue of *Animation World Magazine* contains additional features not found in the download or print Acrobat version, such as Quicktime movies, links to Animation World Network sites, extended articles and special sections. Don't miss the following highlights that are showcased exclusively in this month's *Animation World Magazine* HTML version:

- **Beyond Good and Evil: Piotr Dumala's Crime and Punishment**

Chris Robinson interviews Polish independent animator Piotr Dumala regarding his latest masterpiece, *Crime and Punishment*, leading to a discussion of his unique plaster technique, Hitchcock and post-war Poland. Download and view a QuickTime movie clip online at:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.10/5.10pages/robinsondumala.php3>.

- **Fresh From The Festivals**

Maureen Furniss reviews the following short films: Janno Poldma's *On the Possibility of Love*, Just in Time by Kirsten Winter, Stephen X. Arthur's *Vision Point*, *Passport* by Siri Melchior and The Scarecrow by Cheryl Meier. QuickTime movie clips of each of these films are available for download online at:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.10/5.10pages/5.10festival.php3>.

Down and Out in Toon Town: The Status of Animation Jobs in the United States

by Ilene Renee Gannaway

Ah, those glory days. Are they gone for good?

Just six years ago, Disney's animated feature *The Lion King* grossed \$300 million, making it the number one box-office hit for 1994 and one of the largest grossing films in history.

As a result, Simba wasn't the only one crowned king. The American Animator took his place on a new cinematic throne where he called the literal and figurative shots, reaped countless perks, garnered high salaries and enjoyed free lunches at DreamWorks. As a lowly executive at Turner Feature Animation during the height of the boom, I often found myself thinking, 'If only I could draw like those unbelievably talented animators...hell, if only I could draw...the world would be mine.'

But this is America, not El Dorado, and here everything that goes up must come down — eventually. While the '90s signaled an animator's market, the Millennium, it would seem, favors the financial interests of the studios. This is, of course, bad news for the American Animator King.

According to Steve Hulett, business representative for M.P.S.C. Local 839 IATSE, the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Union, about 35 percent of their current 3,000 members are unemployed.



Times ain't all that good in Los Angeles...

Jeff Massie, the union's recording secretary, estimates that the union has approximately 1,000 fewer people working in union shops than they did three years ago.

According to a recent *LA Times* article, union president Tom Sito is baffled at the current statistics. Notes Sito, "This year, there are seven features being released, 10 new network television series, several prime-time series, more Internet work and cable than ever before, yet we've lost ... a good third of our total jobs."

And who exactly is out-of-work? "The people who are unemployed right now would be, in the biggest market, clean-up artists who don't have CGI (computer-generated imagery) skills," says

Hulett. "Board artists, more or less, are employed or at least partially employed. Television timing directors are underemployed but not unemployed."

When one looks at the big picture, it appears that the three main causes for this increase in unemployment are feature animation downsizing, overseas animation jobs, and, indirectly, the rise of computer animation.

Studio Downsizing

Hulett believes the animation industry is and has always been cyclical. "The chronology of the industry was up and down, spotty in the late '80s," remarks Hulett. "Then *The Little Mermaid* hit, followed by Disney's other hit

features including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. Every other studio decided they had to get into the animation business. They couldn't ignore billion dollar, world-wide grosses.

"So the industry really heated up to unprecedented heights through the mid '90s," he continues. "Since 1997, we've had Fox Phoenix close. Warners has not gone away but has downsized considerably. DreamWorks has downsized and Disney has downsized, so you're faced with a thousand or more jobs that have been lost."

Apparently, the animation boom that exploded in the '90s was too good to last. Barry Weiss, senior vice president of animation production at Sony Pictures Imageworks attributes this fall to the normal fluctuations any industry faces. "Like any other business, the [animation] industry overbuilt and now there's a lot of vacancies," he explains. "People aren't buying as much as they were. But it's all relative. In other words, if the level of employment was a 2 in the beginning of the '90s, and the level of employment was a 10 in '96/'97, it's probably back down to a 7 or an 8. So it's still a helluva lot healthier than it was 10 years ago, but it's definitely come off its peak."

One reason why it might seem there are more people unemployed in the business is that schools have done a remarkable job of pumping out employable talent. So while a lot of these newcomers have been soaked into the system a number haven't been or have displaced people who have been employed for a long time.

Also, feature animation may have suffered from a case of too much too soon. With Disney releasing at least two animated

features a year — and every one touted as an "event" — and other studios racing to deliver what they perceived as guaranteed money-makers, the market became overly-saturated.



Steve Hulett with Rudy Cataldi at the PBS. © AWN, Inc.

A similar situation can be applied to television animation. Hulett believes that instead of focusing on producing quality American shows, the studios "want to make money as quickly as possible." It's easier and cheaper to purchase the Japanese-produced *Pokémon* than it is to do a show like *Animaniacs*.

"The studios, Warners and others, are more impatient with deficit financing than making a profit down the road," explains Hulett. "So hey if you could pick up *Pokémon* for \$10,000 an episode and then spend \$10,000 dubbing it and slightly editing it, that's 20,000 bucks and you're in the profits immediately."

Since most of our animation studios are branches of major corporations, profit margins are closely watched. After all, profits directly correlate to stock prices by which many executives live and die.

Animation veterans also point to another reason for the downsizing. Many television networks and feature film corporations rushed into animation, but when it came time to market the products to the public, they were baffled. So while animation artists created great products, they didn't catch on and make money. Confused by the needs of this new medium and surprised by the necessary commitment to generate a hit, many outlets decided to stop ordering animation, rather than spend the time and money needed to become experts in the field.

Overseas Animation

One of the biggest threats to American animation employment is the use of overseas talent. Television animators, more so than feature animators, are the ones most likely to suffer from American studios sending work overseas and American networks purchasing foreign animated programs. Once again, Hulett states that cost plays a big role.

"In television, you've got a glut of foreign animation," he says. "You have studios like Warner Bros. and Fox Kids who have picked up Japanese animation for the first time and have had pretty good success with it, and it cost them practically nothing." Many fear this trend will grow.

Mark Kausler, an animator who has worked in the business for almost 30 years, believes that "overseas" and "animation" have become synonymous. "I think most producers now think of animation as something that's done in another country," he laments. "They don't even think there are American animators at all. Animation is a commodity that may or may not be prepared here

as far as the story goes, but is always done somewhere else as far as the animation/final artwork goes."

Weiss maintains a very pragmatic view of the situation, admitting that while it may be cheaper to produce animation overseas, the major sacrifice comes in the form of loss of creative control. "Look, the preference for everybody is to keep your supply line short. Do the work locally, you'll have more creative control over the product. When you get your budget, you look at it and start saying, 'How do I get 10 pounds into a five pound bag? What stays in that bag and what goes someplace else?' There's always trade-off here. You're trading creative control to the extent that it represents quality. You're trading that off for the ability to get it done."

Stephanie Graziano, president of programming, production and network development at Bohbot Kids Network (*Roswell Conspiracies*), doesn't see any real trade-offs or significant sacrifices where overseas animation is concerned. BKN is a global, primarily German, television and video animation company with offices in Germany, France and the U.K. While their development and directing talent is based in Los Angeles, "We really look to utilize the resources in all the different countries that we have offices in as well as other countries that have talented resources," says Graziano. "There's a vast amount of talent in the U.S. It isn't always accessible, it isn't always affordable, and it isn't always in the scope of how we want to get a specific project produced."

As Graziano concedes, it is not always in the best artistic inter-

est of studios to use domestic talent only. Why limit ourselves to one vision, they ask, when there are artists all over the world who



Tom Sito, Union President, has long fought for artist rights.

can bring so much to the medium?

"Unfortunately for the workforce [using overseas labor] does divide up the employment," Graziano remarks. "But ultimately for the audiences, it can provide them with a much richer fare of programming."

PBS — Animation's Benedict Arnold?

Virtually no one will deny the fact that we are living in an increasingly global world, and that lots of people in other industries have already lost their jobs to foreign competition. However, many U.S. animators feel an unforgivable line was crossed in August of 1999 when it was announced PBS (Public Broadcasting System) allegedly signed a \$40 million production deal with Canadian-based, TV animation production company, Nelvana. A press release last August stated that Nelvana will "produce the network's first ever Saturday morning children's programming block...for the U.S. public network's Fall 2000 program season."

Such a move prompted angry outrage on behalf of Los Angeles animators who felt betrayed and "slapped in the face." It's one thing for animation jobs to go overseas; it's another for the American government to pay

for it. Union members voiced their anger by picketing in front of PBS last spring.

Veteran animation writer Jeffrey Scott (*Dragon Tales*, *Jim Henson's Muppet Babies*) expressed his utter stupefaction in a recent article to *Animation Magazine*, opining, "I find it offensive that my tax dollars are paying for programs that not only am I prevented from working on, but that reduce by six the number of shows that I or my colleagues might have had a chance to sell."

Donna Williams, director of program press relations at PBS, counters these objections with a few facts. "Less than four percent of our programming involves Canadian production companies," she says. "It's not that we seek partnerships with Canadian companies. We're looking for good programming. And if a particular product fits our mission, that's great and we'll go with it."

Williams echoes Graziano's global views by adding that PBS does not necessarily mean American products solely. "We also deal with international broadcasters," she states. As PBS's mission statement avows, "enriching the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services that inform, inspire and delight," means PBS will not limit itself to the domestic sphere. Rather it must "deal with the world."

Williams adds that in addition to the Nelvana shows, PBS programs a variety of American shows. Among them are *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, *J.J. The Jet Plane* and *Dragon Tales*.

Still, these facts do not mollify the majority of U.S. animators who believe that, as Hulett puts it, "Your tax dollars are paying to put

you out of a job.”

Moreover, while the above shows may be conceived in the U.S., they are not completely produced in the U.S. As Kausler mentioned it is now very unusual for television animation to be done domestically. Furthermore after years in the business, countries like Korea are becoming extremely proficient not only at animation, but layout, digital ink and paint and other previously U.S.-based production steps. Plus, they too are integrating the newest technology into their production routines in order to remain competitive when faced with newer animation nations like India. From central Europe to Vietnam, more countries are competing for animation work than ever before.

As frustrating as this whole, overseas situation may be for jobless animators, Graziano would like to remind them that they are not alone. “There are many, many industries in our country specifically who have gone through this. It’s not something that I think we can do much about.”

Looking To The Future

But surely there must be something animators can do. Both Weiss and Hulett believe that something is computer animation. In fact, Hulett has been encouraging traditional animators to get skilled in such programs as Maya, Photoshop and Renderman.

“CGI is where the industry is going,” says Hulett. “And the more arrows somebody has in their quiver, the more marketable, the more employable they are. There is a great need and a lot of people end up getting hired and employed, especially when they have an artistic background, in those programs.”

For an animator like Kausler who has been drawing since he was eight years-old, learning to computer animate is a bit of an emotional challenge. “I’m doing a little experimental study in Maya. I’m figuring it out, but very little of it has the feel of animation,” Kausler remarks. “It feels like learning a lot of menus and commands. You can get used to them, but I don’t know if I would ever have the love for them that I have for drawing.”

Weiss understands this frustration, but agrees with Hulett that retraining is utterly necessary to an animator’s future. “If you were a carpenter and someone handed you a powersaw and you’ve been working your whole life with a handsaw, you’re going to take a step back,” says Weiss. “Eventually you are going to work faster, probably be able to do more with the powersaw. But initially you’re going to miss the handsaw because you knew exactly what to do with it.”

Imageworks, thus far, has been very successful at training traditional animators in computer animation programs. And the Union is in the process of working under an H1B grant to retrain a lot of their members. Does this mean 2D animation is dead? Hulett doesn’t think so.

“Two-D animation will not go away,” he remarks. “It will mutate and change, but it’ll still be there in some way, shape or form. I see new technology continuing to develop and layer over old technology.”

So essentially employability in animation is not just a case of who you know, but what you know. In the end, it’s simple. The more skills an animator has, the more employable he or she is.

Says Hulett, “I think the industry is going to continue to grow overall, but people are going to have to retrain like mad to stay current.

“There’s going to be different layers and levels of employment,” he adds, “and I think people will find that overall the animation industry (including CGI animation, traditional animation, television animation, theatrical animation, live-action visual effects) is merging. It’s all becoming a big ball of the same kind of stuff. If you know where to look for work and if you have the right, marketable skills, [animation] is still very lucrative and fulfilling. For those who aren’t trained for the future, it’s gonna be much, much more difficult. I think that’s just the reality.”

So, hopefully, just as the once-exiled Simba returned to Pride Rock stronger than ever, the American Animator King can make a significant comeback.

Ilene Renee Gannaway is a freelance writer who served as Director of Development for Turner Feature Animation and as Manager of Development, Motion Pictures for Hanna-Barbera Cartoons. She is currently pursuing her Master's Degree in English Literature and after graduation will, like many animation folks, be in need of a job.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Debris from Dot Com Crash Hits Animators

by Michael Hurwicz

The dot com crash has killed many Internet-focused business ventures, massacred stock prices, vaporized investors. Fortunes have been lost, careers mauled.

Like other Internet sectors (and animation sectors for that matter), online entertainment overbuilt and suffered the wrecking ball. As recently as early 2000, there was a voracious market for short, attention-grabbing Flash animations for the Web. Today, opportunities are largely drying up, along with the flow of venture capital. The mood of euphoria has been replaced by one of caution.

Still, there is some good news: major competitors biting the dust (at least temporarily) leave the field clearer for those who remain. In addition, both the continued advance of technology and the increasing sophistication of Internet users, favor the growth of



Exit 109, part of JibJab's toon line-up that makes use of the Internet integrating simple game playing along with the presentation. © JibJab Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

multimedia in the medium and for the long term. There are and will continue to be significant opportunities on the Internet for independent animators.

Tales from the Golden Age

Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear: late 1999 and early 2000. Investors are pouring money into

dot coms, including online entertainment companies. Companies like AtomFilms, iFilm and MediaTrip, who are dedicated to distributing visual entertainment over the Internet, scour the world for material to fill their sites. Each is trying to get bigger and better, faster than its competitors. Content acquisition executives are particularly looking for short animations, which offer quick downloads and viewing for impatient Netizens. In particular, online entertainment sites favor animations in the Flash format, because of the wide support for Flash in browsers. Animators capable of producing short, entertaining Flash animations find sky-high demand for their skills and product.

In March, 1999, unknown independent animators Mark Brooks and Peter Gilstrap submitted a 23-minute pilot *Creamburg* to HBO. Brooks did the animation, and Gilstrap much of the writing. "I did it in Flash, just because it was cheap," says Brooks. That turned out to be a fortunate choice. Although they had not submitted the tape to MediaTrip, someone there saw the pilot. MediaTrip quickly made an offer to fund it. The creators couldn't accept the offer though, because HBO was still considering *Creamburg*. Instead, Brooks and Gilstrap conceived another animation, *Li'l Pimp*, for which MediaTrip funded production. Eventually,

CREAMBURG



MediaTrip.com's successful original series *Creamburg*. © 1999-2000 MediaTrip.com, Inc. All rights reserved.



Mark Brooks and Peter Gilstrap, series creators of *Creamburg* and *Li'l Pimp*. © 1999-2000 MediaTrip.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

HBO passed on *Creamburg* and MediaTrip took that as well. From that exposure, Brooks and Gilstrap got work doing two-minute *Creamburg* interstitials for the television cable channel. They were also hired to do Flash animation for *The Slim Shady Show* for rapper Eminem. In August, 2000, Revolution Studios, which is closely linked with MediaTrip, announced a full length *Li'l Pimp* feature film for 2001. Brooks' and Gilstrap's Creative Men Productions will produce, script and manage the creative aspects of the movie. In addition, they have majority ownership of the project.



JibJab founders, Gregg ("Jib," right) and Evan ("Jab," left) Spiridellis.
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Brooklyn, New York-based JibJab Media was formed late in 1999 by Gregg and Evan Spiridellis. Neither of the founders were in the animation industry, nor were any of the half dozen or so artists they eventually hired. They were illustrators, photographers, painters. But, seeing an opportunity in the Web, they learned Flash and turned out some short, funny animations, such as rap parodies of the founding fathers. In short order, JibJab cut a deal with AtomFilms, who put the animations on their site and ultimately licensed them to the history channel to promote a miniseries on the founding fathers.

Another piece was sub-licensed to *Mad TV*. All in all, JibJab did three deals with AtomFilms, as well as deals with Yahoo and Shockwave. One of their animations, *Capitol III*, a Bush/Gore rap, was used in an Altoids commercial.



JibJab's *Capitol III*, a political rap spoof teaming Al Gore and George W. Bush, has proven to bring back viewers.
© JibJab Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

Another Net winner is New York-based independent animator Bill Plympton. Already an established cartoonist, he contacted AtomFilms late in 1999. They bought exclusive rights to his entire library for two years. In addition to sharing banner ad revenue, the material is licensed to airlines and TV stations, as well as other dot coms.

Xeth Feinberg, also based

in New York City, got his first paid work on the Net at the end of 1999, doing a series of animations based on his Bulbo character for the Hotwired Animation Express. He also got hired to do animations for sci-fi.com, a site connected with the science-fiction cable channel.

Pay was originally low, says Feinberg, but it was okay because he could produce the content quickly (he draws directly in Flash using only a mouse), and with a staff of "one and a half" — himself plus a part-time assistant.

Feinberg connected with Icebox when it launched in January, 2000. He quickly got an assignment to develop two series, *Hard Drinkin' Lincoln* and *Queer Duck*, in collaboration with Mike Reiss, executive producer of *The Simpsons*. Meanwhile, Bulbo moved on from Hotwired to Mondo Media. In both cases, he was paid to produce the content and shares in ongoing revenues.

Big players were on the move, too. For instance, the Digital Entertainment Network (DEN) showed short films and television-style shows aimed at 14- to



Icebox's *Hard Drinkin' Lincoln* presents Abraham Lincoln: statesman, leader, beloved President — and America's favorite boozehound! © 2000 Mishmash Media/Icebox, Inc.

24-year-olds, attracting major backers such as Dell Computer, Enron, Intel, Microsoft and NBC. Frank Mancuso, former chairman and chief executive of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, joined the board of directors in February.

Then, DreamWorks SKG and Imagine Entertainment announced pop.com, a site that would launch in the spring with a mix of animated and live-action short films.

After the Deluge

Then came the crash.

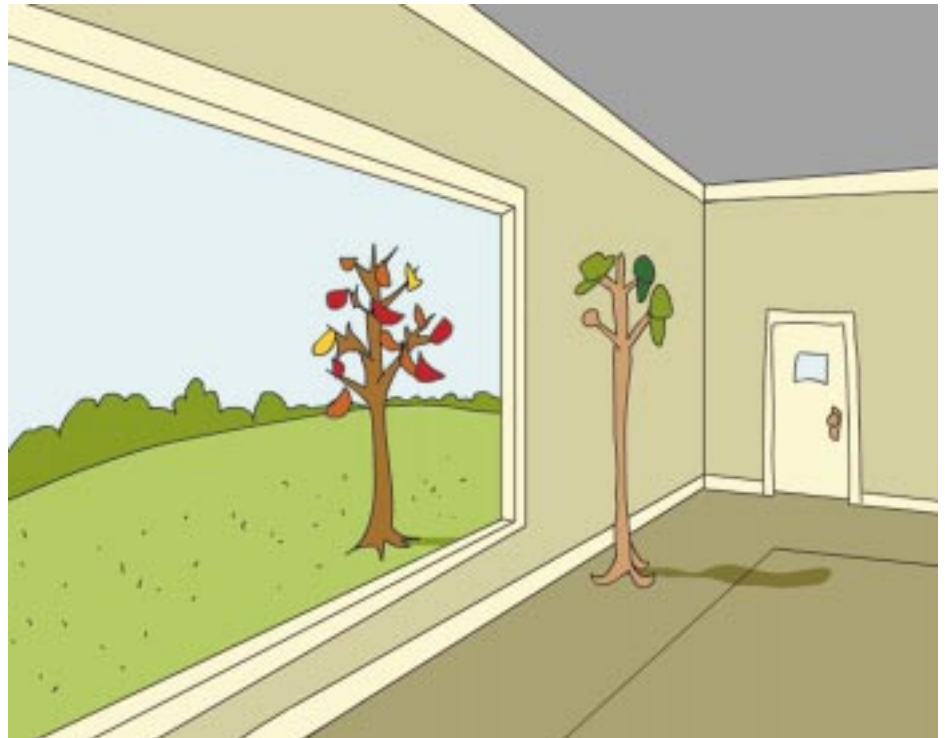
One early sign came in February, when DEN withdrew its \$75 million initial public offering, on the same day two top executives, Chairman and CEO Jim Ritts and Chief Operating Officer Bruce Gamache, announced their decision to leave the company. Today, www.den.com is "server not found."

Pop.com abandoned its original plans before their first short aired on the Web. Today, its original plans lying amidst the dot com rubble, pop.com is offering trailers for *The Nutty Professor* and the latest Brad Pitt/Julia Roberts movie.

Opportunities for quick success have largely dried up.



JibJab's Geezers presents Leo and Cicero who know a thing or two about bingo, Denny's discounts and moons over my hammy. © JibJab Media, Inc. All rights reserved.



Plympton's Seasons is a Flash animation that deviates from his traditional, albeit inimitable, sight gags and instead meditates on the nature of time. © AtomFilms.

"After Pop's downfall, the buzz has dissipated," says Evan Spiridellis of JibJab Media. "Before, friends on the West Coast were calling every day, wanting to learn Flash. All of a sudden, they're not calling. Or they're calling, but they're not talking about online content."

Picking Up the Pieces

Even post-crash, more animations are seen every day on the Internet. However, banner ads are typically the only direct revenue generated from them, and that doesn't amount to much. Advertisers typically pay sites \$10 to \$20 per thousand views for banner ads. On iFilm (one of the few sites to reveal how many hits a particular movie gets), the most-watched animation of all time, *The Biliad*, had just under 36,000 hits when we checked in December, 2000. That would be \$360 to \$720 in banner ad income.

On iFilm, animators aren't

sharing in ad revenues anyway, or getting any direct revenue from the site. Animators put their work on iFilm for feedback and exposure. But even if iFilm did share revenues (as AtomFilms does, for instance), you wouldn't want to count on paying the rent with the proceeds.

"The Internet offers a lot of possibilities for independent animators: new audiences and revenue streams, new venues. But it's very difficult as a complete and sole business," says Eric Calderon, a development executive at AtomFilms.

"A new business model has to arise," says Brooks. "Content has to be paid for, otherwise no one is going to pay you to do it."

"It's been a grim ending to the year for a lot of people," says Gilstrap. "Asking people about animation on the Internet now is like asking survivors from Custer's last stand about their career in the military. We've been fortunate that



In Ed Anderson's *The Bottle*, we find our hero as he is accosted by giant slugs.
© AtomFilms.

we've bounced out of it [into television and movies]. People that are strictly on the Internet, I wish them good luck. It's a tough sell."

Like Gilstrap and Brooks, Plympton's Net momentum has helped propel offline success. Money from AtomFilms helped finance Plympton's animated feature film, *Mutant Aliens*, opening at Sundance in 2001. "I wouldn't have been able to make *Mutant Aliens* without AtomFilms," says Plympton.

AtomFilms itself continues to pursue traditional offline outlets as energetically as online ones. For example, much of AtomFilms' success with JibJab came in sublicensing to ABC and Fox's *Mad TV*. They also do deals with airlines, such as Air Canada, British Airways, Continental, Cathay Pacific and United. AtomFilms is investigating new outlets, too. One is handheld devices, such as pocket PCs. Another is kiosks at malls, where a pay-per-view format might work, where targeted advertising would be a natural, and where long download times could be eliminated through caching on a local hard disk.

Mondo Media, meanwhile,

is placing heavy emphasis on syndication — getting content onto multiple big sites, such as Lycos and Netscape. If no single site can attract enough eyeballs to make online production pay, multiple sites may do the trick.

New Avenues

In addition, in search of outlets for their talents, Flash animators are often branching out into advertising and marketing, fields where demand promises to grow, if only moderately, in coming years. In the December, 2000, report "Streaming Video Advertising: Despite Hype, Limited Opportunity," analyst firm Jupiter Communications, predicts that by 2003, 20% of online advertising will consist of streaming and rich media (e.g. Flash).

JibJab started pursuing these areas intensively in September 2000. "We're pursuing opportunities in the advertising industry and helping corporate clients create interesting entertainment-based 'viral' marketing campaigns," says Gregg Spiridellis. (Viral marketing works by getting users of a service to spread the word about the service. An exam-

ple is a free email service that includes a blurb about the service at the bottom of each message.)

Within the online marketing space, JibJab is looking for outlets other than the client's Website as well. "There are a hundred other ways to get content out there: email, PDAs, third party sites not related to the client site," says Gregg Spiridellis.

JibJab is also building a library of characters that could be spokes mascots for certain brands. Continuously finding projects in the marketing space that can pay the bills allows JibJab to keep creating shorts and putting them online.



Another scene from JibJab's *Capitol III*.
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One emerging area of online advertising that may offer employment to animators is streaming ad insertion, in which streaming ad content is inserted into other streaming content. Inserted ads are harder to ignore than banner ads, because they appear in the area of the screen where you're focusing. In addition, it may be possible to relate the ads to the content the user initially requests, allowing targeted advertising.

For these reasons, inserted ads bring high response rates. Thus, for the same number of eyeballs, advertisers are willing to pay more for streaming insertion. (Banner ads cost \$10 to \$20 per

thousand views on average; streaming insertion is usually over \$20.)

Streaming ad insertion could benefit animators in two ways: First, as online entertainment sites increase their revenues by inserting ads in animations, the value of those animations increases. Animators could share in those revenues. In addition, animators can play a role in creating streaming ads. Enterprising animators could even create shorts with ad insertion in mind and pitch them to sponsors. One sure way of getting a favorable reception from a content distribution site is to approach them with a sponsor in hand.

There are signs that streaming ad insertion is picking up steam. For instance, in December, Akamai announced its MediaPlus Advertising service, to help streaming content providers insert ads. Ads are provided by Engage and Hitplay Media, two of the biggest ad companies on the Net. The first two users of the service will be iClips, a free service allowing users to incorporate streaming video into email or Websites, and StudioNext, a digital media pro-

duction house. Akamai is one of the major content delivery networks (CDNs) helping content providers speed streaming content across the Net. Some sites, such as iFilm, that offer animated content on the Web already use Akamai's CDN services.

The Bright Side

Even today, those who have a toehold on the Net are not complaining. For instance, with their early strike-while-the-Net-is-hot success and new diversification, JibJab is in "great shape," says Gregg Spiridellis. "At the end of the day, [the dot-com crash] helps us, because we don't have competitors spending tens of millions of dollars. We have time to build our brand, our audience and our business over time."

Feinberg also sees a bright side to the dot com crash. "So far my income has not gone down. In fact, a lot of dot coms are now outsourcing more production. So I'm the model for what they want to do. I really think the Internet is still an amazing opportunity for animators. In the medium and long term view, I'm still very excited about it." In fact in recent

moves both Icebox and Wirebreak have laid off staff citing this new business model of outsourcing their productions. Some Internet players like UrbanEntertainment have never held animators on staff and have outsourced since day one.

The door is not entirely closed to new talent, either.



One of Xeth Feinberg's creations — follow Bulbo as he strolls through many adventures. © 2000 Mishmash Media/Icebox, Inc.

"The number of companies and Websites that will air that content has gone down," says Philo Northrup, director of content acquisition for Mondo Media. "And the bar has gotten higher as to what is considered viable content, as far as production values, writing, art direction and music. But there's still an audience for good ideas well executed. We're constantly looking at new shows."

Another site that is still acquiring online entertainment is shockwave.com. Possibly the most popular entertainment site on the Net, Shockwave is by no means limited to animated shorts. They have games, music, puzzles and interactive greeting cards. However, they're still soliciting animations, as well.

Here's an optimistic forecast for animation on the Net:

* Technology continues to



Icebox's Queer Duck tells us that gay doesn't just mean happy. © 2000 Mishmash Media/Icebox, Inc.

improve. In particular, bandwidth increases dramatically, so download times become negligible.

* Audience continues to increase, so that sales numbers become more attractive.

* A "micro-payment" infrastructure is developed that allows users to pay small amounts (in the range of a few cents per viewing) conveniently on the Net.

"The potential for self-distribution is vast on the Internet," says independent animator Corky Quakenbush. "The biggest impact will be when we as artists can reach our audience directly, without the filter of a gauntlet of executives who want to shape our material to their perceptions of what's good or sellable."

Quakenbush believes that will come about through micro-payments, probably within two to three years.

"Then we will be able to deliver to our fans exactly what we want to give them and get paid for our work," says Quakenbush. Then, he adds, success will relate more directly to artistic skill than to the ability to schmooze the right people. "Not that marketing will be nonexistent, but it will not be the 95% of the game that it is today in moving image art forms."

Despite the dot com crash, some animators and entertainment sites will continue to flourish, says Quakenbush. That includes companies like AtomFilms. Even more importantly, it includes "little sites that are simple and creatively free, started and run by artists for no other reason than to work in a new medium. I think that they represent the reason the boom took place. Investors saw unrestrained creativity exhibited along with the disenfranchised populace who



Bill Plympton's *The Secret to Olympic Gold USA* asks who needs arms and legs when you've got missile mammaries? © AtomFilms.

have turned off their TVs and booted up. It was the attempt to fit anarchy into a corporate structure which doomed the first phase of the revolution to failure."

Quakenbush also states, "I see the ability to deliver streaming media on high speed connections and the availability of that technology to the general public coming about in two to three years. I see micro-payment models lagging a bit behind, unfortunately. I hope I'm wrong there..."

It remains to be seen how the corporate mentality will evolve to accommodate the new outlet as well as how the new outlet will embrace the evolving art forms."

Take Note!

Can independent animators make money selling VHS tapes through outlets such as amazon.com? We aren't aware that anyone has done this with an animation, however, it has been reported that *George Lucas in Love*, a live-action MediaTrip short, sold more copies on amazon.com than the *Star Wars* original it parodies. More concretely, that meant

20,000 copies at \$7 or \$8 a copy, as of August, 2000. The publisher gets 45% of the list price, say \$3.50 per copy. Manufacturing videos in that quantity costs around \$1.50 a copy. Therefore, *Lucas* might have netted \$40,000 for its creators through amazon.com.

Michael Hurwicz believes in fairy tales, cartoons, music, trees and chocolate.

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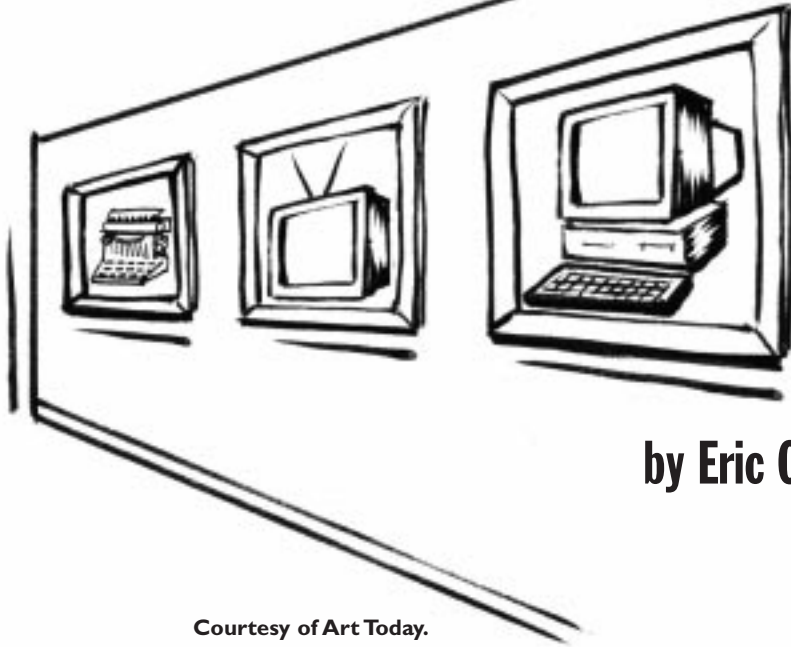
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Finding Lucy



Courtesy of Art Today.

by Eric Oldrin

In October 1951, America saw the pilot episode of a simple show called *I Love Lucy*. With only five thousand dollars of their own money, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez created what turned out to be an instant smash hit — a show which never ranked lower than third in popularity during its entire six-year run. In fact, *I Love Lucy* could easily be considered the “killer application” that inspired millions of Americans to purchase a television set. It’s true. In 1951 fewer than 10 million households were watching TV; by 1954 as many as 50 million people were tuning in.¹

I Love Lucy captured the heart of its audience by embracing television as a unique entertainment experience — as something other than radio or film. Early television tended to mirror radio. It took shows like *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners* to define this

medium — to create an entirely new entertainment experience.

In Need of Identity

Fifty years later, we’re at a similar crossroads. Dozens of productions have cropped up in this space we call the Internet. There have been a few successes and a few casualties but most would agree, we’ve yet to see our *I Love Lucy*. What will it take to create the next “killer application” — an experience that undeniably proves the Web as an entertainment medium in its own right? Let’s take a look at some of today’s popular trends as a point of departure on our way to answering this difficult question.

Like the early pioneers of television, it seems that many Web entertainers have chosen to replicate the format of their predecessors. The majority of today’s online distributors tend to present very linear content — stories that

would be better if broadcast on television. In many cases, this is a core tenet of their business strategy.

For some companies, the Web serves as a low-cost test bed for linear content and a Web show that spins off to television is heralded as a great triumph. There can be value in this strategy of creating made-for-TV Web content. For instance, BBC America has taken on Mondo Media’s *Thugs on Film* and Dotcomix’s *Sister Randy*. But in the context of our discussion — that of inventing a new entertainment experience in its own right — there’s something inherently flawed with this kind of opportunistic creativity.



Sister Randy, featured on Dotcomix, heads for television with BBC America.
© Dotcomix.

Why Bother?

It renders a sort of dispassionate art — created as a means, not an ends — rather than the *I Love Lucy* experience that defined its own medium. For these creators, the Web is an audition, not the main attraction. Even the best linear Web shows, the one’s lucky enough break into the big leagues of analog entertainment — like UrbanEntertainment’s *Undercover Brother* — seem truly at home only when released from their digital bondage.

The result is a slew of short-

¹ *How Hits Happen*, Winston Farrel - quoting David Halberstam’s book *The Fifties*

form animated and live-action productions thinly veiled as Web shows but clearly suited for television. The download is sometimes painfully long, the quality is often very poor and most importantly, the format is consistently uninspired, leaving the viewer wondering why they didn't just turn on the TV. "There is a very small percentage of content on the Web today that actually utilizes the medium fully," says Tony Lopez, executive site producer at Shockwave. "This is partly because there are so many cross-over content producers who came from linear entertainment and it's partly because it is not a simple thing to do."

It's understandable why so many Web productions have followed the existing linear entertainment archetype. On the other end of the spectrum, there are several non-linear debacles that take existing narratives and force them to become interactive. This simply does not work. It too often breaks that essential *suspension of disbelief* necessary in any good storytelling.

Finding A Voice

These early experiments have been key in the evolution of the "killer application" but they also tend to confuse the issue. Many of these shows have given Web entertainment a bad name and in the creator community have misrepresented the true essence of interactivity. "At the outset, a nascent entertainment medium tends to simply repackage existing forms of expression from more established media. Eventually, the new medium will find its own voice and will discover how to take full advantage of its own set of unique attributes," says Todd

Shaiman, product manager at Shockwave. But this will take time.

We're beginning to see signs that the Internet is exploring its own form of expression. Some hits have emerged — not from the virtual television pitches or from shows that simply slap a quiz onto the end of an episode — but from the Joe Cartoons, the Jib Jabs and the Flinchs, content producers that take "full advantage [of the Web's] unique attributes," without sacrificing the integrity of their narrative.



Another popular Dotcomix creation, *Thugs on Film*, destined for television through BBC America. © Dotcomix.

So, what are these unique attributes and how does one harmonize them within existing narrative forms? Lopez continues, "True interactive Web content is part CD-ROM, part console game and

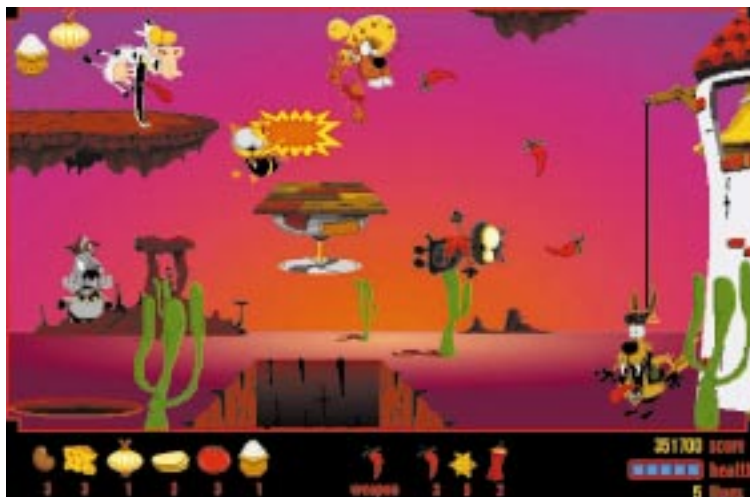
many parts good storytelling." Interactivity is a catch-all word that is often used to describe the nature of the Internet. It means competing, playing, inventing, building, sharing, communing, speaking, listening — it is the essence of communication and community. With interactivity, a story is told as much by the audience as it is by the author.

It's a daunting task. Where television gave our artists a black, white and gray color palette — the Internet gives them the rainbow and a few ultraviolet colors to boot. There's almost too many choices. The struggle today is to understand and utilize all the interactive opportunities at hand *without* breaking the suspension of disbelief so essential in our stories.

Types of Interactivity

Let's take a minute to explore some of these interactive opportunities:

Competing and Playing — perhaps the simplest to understand, playing is best represented by games which embrace a variety of genres: action, adventure, sports, simulation, puzzles. Games are often played many times before growing old, which can



Shockwave's *Tamale Loco* is an interactive game available to anyone with access to the Internet. © Shockwave.com.



Sony's Photo Jam is available for download on Shockwave's site and allows users to create personalized photo presentations synched to their favorite music.
© Shockwave.com.

brand's impact, hold a user's attention longer and deepen the overall experience.

Speaking and Listening — clearly the most elusive of all interactive tools, the Web can allow a narrative to become a conversation. The listener becomes the speaker. The speaker becomes the listener. The story becomes a truly immersive experience. In the past, there have been a number of logistical difficulties putting this into practice. Again, how does one maintain that *suspension of disbelief*? However, this form also promises to be one of the most compelling.

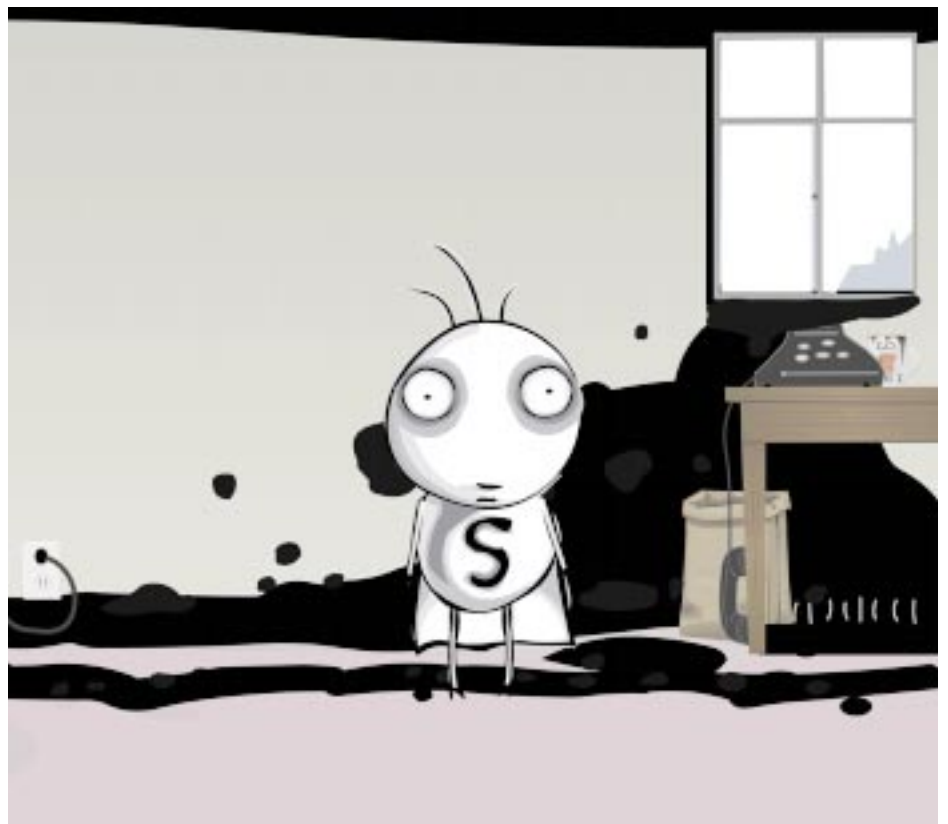
That's a very brief summary of some of the opportunities within interactivity that are still in their infancy. Despite our tendency to gravitate toward what we know, a few brave pioneers are beginning to emerge. On Shockwave alone, I've seen several examples that

make them valuable properties. However, they tend to be lighter on story and character than other entertainment experiences. Historically, *playing* has often relied heavily on the audience and not so much on the author. This puts the *suspension of disbelief* at risk. Today, there are advances being made to reconcile this rift between puzzle and prose and within the next year perhaps we will see an elegant marriage between games and narrative.

Inventing and Building — some of the most powerful interactive tools on the Web are those which allow users to create their very own content. People spend hours importing pictures, editing their music and building their portfolio of self-generated art. The beauty of these applications is in their simplicity and the empowerment that they bestow. The entertainment experience includes the act of creation itself and the satisfaction of performing for others. Today's basic creation tools often lack any sense of character or story but again, in the coming year this may change.

Sharing and Communing — many times content that users create is shared with others within an online community. Often users

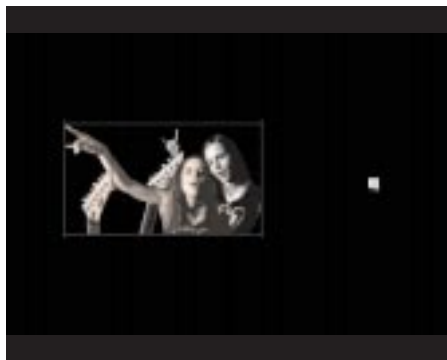
post thoughts on message boards or contribute opinions to a poll. These simple formats are just the beginning of community on the Web. More inspired, better integrated communities are starting to evolve, ones which literally wrap into existing brands, characters or narrative content and draw the user into the experience. These communities help to strengthen a



Another part of Shockwave's available line-up, Tim Burton's World of Stainboy, offers clips, character studies and play time. © Shockwave.com.

leverage each of these opportunities. *Tamale Loco* ties character and story into the proven thrill of a side-scrolling adventure game; the new *Photo Jam* lets users create their own media-rich photo presentation; a *Def Tones* video allows people to share their images with others in future evolving video releases; and Tim Burton's *World of Stainboy* is an immersive, community-based environment encouraging viewers to explore its richness of characters and narrative.

It's an exciting time for entertainment. A revolution as significant as television is at hand and the audience is waiting. According to market-research firm Cyber Dialogue, over 25 million users are demanding to interact with media online. Perhaps with the right application of these interactive



The Deftones' new video for their song "Back to School" is featured on Shockwave along with an interactive game and band bio. © Shockwave.com.

opportunities, one that engages the audience without sacrificing the ancient art of storytelling, we will find our Lucy.

Views expressed in this article are those of Eric Oldrin, and not necessarily that of shockwave.com.

Eric Oldrin is the senior producer of series and show content for Shockwave. Since joining Shockwave, Oldrin has produced and developed some of its key content, including Tim Burton's World of Stainboy. Prior to joining Shockwave, Oldrin helped build Mondo Media's online animation studio and produced The God and Devil Show, Thugs on Film and Like, News. Before that, he created games at America Online's WorldPlay Entertainment and Sierra Online's Imagination Network. Eric holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Pomona College.

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Movie! Movie!

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman



While Mrs. Tweedy carefully checked the egg quota, the clay animation comedy *Chicken Run* raised the roof with high box office returns. TM & © 2000 DreamWorks L.L.C.

What's funnier than a Presidential election hamstrung by recounts, lawyers and scads of chad piled higher than the budget for *Dinosaur*? Why, it's my own predictions about the cinematic winners for the year 2000! If you check back to my January column of last year "Year In, Year Out," you will find the following fiascos of clairvoyance: *Fantasia/2000* to gross \$225 million (Actual gross: \$59,103,478), *Chicken Run* to be a noble but ultimately unprofitable venture with a take of \$28 million (Actual gross: \$106,793,915), and *Vortex* to earn \$25 million (What?

The picture was canceled!?). I selected two films to break into the hallowed animated top ten of all time as measured by box office gross, and not one film released in the millennium year managed to join that august circle. You heard it here first folks: The Cubs take the Series next year.

There is some solace to be gained: I was at least as good as prognosticators using the science of "audience response tracking" to project the final take of Hollywood films over the past year (and at a much cheaper price, I might add). It might be reasonable to assume that I would simply pack up my

crystal ball for 2001 and spare myself future humiliations, but your monthly columnist does not know the meaning of the word "reasonable." As long as I am looking at the future year in feature films and not controlling the keys to the President's nuclear "football," none of you need worry; I can only incinerate myself.



The highest rated show on television for kids 2-11 the *Rugrats* series hit theatres with its second feature release, *Rugrats in Paris*. TM & © 2000 Paramount Pictures and Viacom International Inc.

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Out of the running for this column (since it will not appear until after these films are released) are *The Emperor's New Groove* and *Rugrats in Paris*. I will, however, venture to say that it may not be too surprising if the precocious potty-pals pull a preponderance of the prize. As much as I admired Mark Dindal's direction on *Cats Don't Dance* (now, there's one film that should demand a recount), this project has been far too disorganized. Whether this film was once called *Kingdom of the Sun* or *Kingdom in the Sun*, it appears that the whole endeavor has spent too much time in the sun. During its stint in Production Hell, this film has had so many conceptual problems that some insiders thought that *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* might actually beat it to the screen. The entire tone of the picture was reconceived, and the new title sounds like a desperate attempt to slap a hip grin on a



Set in the early 20th century, Disney's *Atlantis* introduces audiences to an explorer, Milo Thatcher, who uses a mysterious map to lead a mission to find the lost city of Atlantis.
© Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

panicked face. This might just be Disney's biggest box office bust in years. *The Rugrats*, on the other hand, have already proven they can bust a move past the \$100 million barrier, and the experienced direction of Stig Berqvist and Paul Demeyer will guarantee that nothing goes too badly astray. Look for theaters to fill with the kids who comprise this show's most loyal audience...and the parents who have to *schlep* them there.

The nine top-grossing animated feature films for the year 2000 averaged a take of \$50,179,964...

Now for the features of 2001. Note: The nine top-grossing animated feature films for the year 2000 averaged a take of \$50,179,964, but only *three* of those films actually grossed more than the average. Four of that top nine did not even gross *half* the average. This suggests two important facts: First, it is extremely difficult for animated films to break

even, let alone challenge the record books. Second, it may not get any better for the class of 2001 although there should be some exceptions. There will be some definitive losers, but don't weep too hard for them; most animated films don't have "legs" at the box office but their videos and DVDs always seem to sell after the wreckage has settled. I have chosen to look at what should be the top eight (possibly nine) releases for 2001, and will hazard a guess as to how they will hold up in the cinematic marketplace. Since I no longer trust any given release date (even in a trailer) I will prognosticate in alphabetical order.

Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Disney). Projected release: June, 2001.

Arrrgh, me lads! Ye can bet it won't be lost fer long! Disney goes back to the successful formula that made *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* a major hit. This time they've got a first-class sci-fi script, smashmouth CGI — and not one song by Phil Collins! (The intriguing trailer is highly recommended.) Co-directors Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale are as venerable as the sunken city itself, and this film has scant competition this summer — most of the other major releases are spring or Holiday fare. The usual Disney ani-

mation crew will be on board with talent to spare, and John Pomeroy has returned to the fold years after the Great Bluth Exodus. For those of you (including old Doc Toon) who have hungered for Disney feature animation to engage in some serious science-fiction, this should be a ripping treat. Keelhaul those faux-Broadway flicks with hero/ines questing to find their true selves! Throw the comedy-relief sidekicks overboard! Take 'er down, Cap'n! Dive! *Predicted gross: \$107 million.*

I have chosen to look at what should be the top eight releases for 2001...

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (Columbia). Projected release: July, 2001.

This \$75 million science-fiction adventure is based on the mega-popular *Final Fantasy* video game series, so director Hironobu Sakaguchi needs to provide some backstory for those who have day jobs and thumbs that are used to grasp pencils and pens. This film reportedly uses CGI rendering so advanced that its characters are of photographic quality. Ming-Na, James Woods and Donald Sutherland are aboard as voice actors. Design is by Yoshitaka Amano (who engineered the video game characters) so the overall look of the film is consistent for fans who live in the *Final Fantasy* universe. Those fans are truly the ones spreading most of the buzz about this picture; my concern is that the vast majority of moviegoers are unfamiliar with

the game and will confuse the film with some kind of softcore flick...if they pay any attention at all. Columbia may be left with a visually striking cult hit for a very small cult. But it's probably worth the price of admission to see the next step in CGI. The trailer has some truly remarkable moments when one can't tell if one is watching a CGI or "real" actor – but can it be sustained for the entire picture? *Predicted gross: \$30 million.*



DNA Productions' *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* will be the first Nickelodeon property to be launched as a multi-platform franchise. © DNA Productions.

Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius (DNA Productions and O Entertainment by way of Nickelodeon Movies and Paramount Pictures). Projected release: One of these days, 2001.

Nickelodeon is pushing this redheaded, inventive boy genius (say *what*, Mr. Tartakovsky?) as one of the major market must-haves for next Holiday season. The character originally appeared in a 1995 short as Johnny Quasar, and some potential was obviously seen. Look for a marketing blitz as the TV series and movie are planned for near-simultaneous release. The film will be handled by DNA Productions (who recently brought us the precious *Olive, the Other Reindeer*), with direction by John A. Davis. Animation is CGI. Is this Nick's answer to *Dexter*? I have a feeling that Jimmy had better build a few battle robots,

posthaste. *Predicted gross: \$14 million.*

Monkeybone (FOX). Projected release: April 11, 2001.

This stop-motion/live-action picture was originally slated for a November 2000 release under the title *Dark Town*. Henry Selick is directing, and those of us who enjoyed *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *James and the Giant Peach* know that a pro is at the reins. However, this film might be a difficult sell. We have Brendan Fraser as a cartoonist who finds himself comatose after a car crash. Deep in the recesses of his mind lies a mad cartoon world known as Dark Town, and there our hero meets his crowning creation, a character called Monkeybone (Paul Rubens). If Monkeybone can't get his creator back in his conscious mind soon, Death (Whoopi Goldberg) takes all. This is a bit too close to *Cool World* for me, and Selick does not direct like Ralph Bakshi to begin with. Toss in complicated subplots that include a God of Nightmares, multiple body inhabitations, organ harvesting and other plot points I don't wish to give away, and audi-

ences may find themselves longing for the simple charms of Selick's earlier efforts. Did I mention that it opens on the same day as *Pokémon 3*? Place your bets. *Predicted gross: \$16 million.*

Monsters, Inc. (Disney/Pixar). Projected release: November, 2001.

Monsters in the closet! Monsters under the bed! Monsters at the box office! This project, which started out as *The Hidden City*, will be the blockbuster of the new year. When the secret dimension of scary monsters is breached by (gaspl!) a human child, havoc ensues. The available trailer already suggests that directors Pete Docter and David Silverman know how to build some engaging, funny characters, and the Pixar record has been a solid one as far as entertainment and profits are concerned. Billy Crystal, John Goodman and Jennifer Tilly will be among the voice cast. Just try keeping the kids out of the theaters for this one, especially since they'll be following *you* as fast as they can run. My only concerns might be possible over-promotion and death-by-tie-ins, but none of



***Monsters, Inc.* plans to serve up comedy in the realm of things that go bump in the night. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.**

that seemed to hurt *The Grinch* a bit. Predicted gross: \$128 million.

Osmosis Jones (Warner Bros.). Projected release: August, 2001.

Osmosis Jones is a live-action/animated film that plays like a cross between a detective buddy flick and *Fantastic Voyage*. Direction is handled by Tom Sito, a key player in the Disney animation revival, and Piet Kroon, who labored on *The Iron Giant* and *Quest for Camelot*, while making the indy short *T.R.A.N.S.I.T.* The animator list reads like a recent *Who's Who* from the Disney and DreamWorks studio, the live-action segments are directed by the frenetic Farrelly brothers, and the voice cast (which includes Chris Rock and David Hyde Pierce) is a strong one. By all rights, this should be one of the better pictures and top grossers of the year. However, advance releases mention scenes in which the heroes enter a zit, are inundated by snot and make a trip to "Gonad's Gym." While I'm sure that ample and visually opulent tribute is made to the miracles of the human body, the pandering to adolescent gross-out humor raises my eyebrows. Perhaps such could be expected with the Farrellys on board, but those are not the sequences they directed. Predicted gross (so to speak): \$67 million.

Powerpuff Girls: The Movie

(Warner Bros. via Cartoon Network Studios). Projected release at this time: Summer 2001.

A caveat here: Some sources are listing this release for 2002. The film has a reported budget of \$25 million (not counting expenses for Chemical X), and we can expect Cathy Cavadini, Tara Charendoff, E.G. Daily and



Protecting "the city of Frank," Osmosis Jones, voiced by Chris Rock, fights evil viruses vigilante style in Warner Bros. new live-action animated film *Osmosis Jones*. © 2000 Warner Bros.

Tom Kane to reprise their "Cartoon Cartoon" roles for the film. The styling and animation for this cartoon may actually be simple enough to meet the projected release date given above, but let's hope that Craig McCracken and company take the time to brush

up on their rave/anime/comic book roots and pen a good screenplay. While I can't blame them for jumping on this project while the girls (and their merchandise) are red-hot, let's hope that this film is not merely tossed up on the screen for the sake of quick cash. With proper care, the *Powerpuff* movie will pull in *Rugrats*-level box office. Three cheers for the red, green and blue! Predicted gross: \$90 million.

Recess: School's Out (Disney).

Projected release: February, 2001.

At least one synopsis states that T.J. Detweiler and his precocious cohorts from the TV series *Recess* will battle the sinister Dr. Benedict's plan to introduce eternal winter, thus ending summer vacations permanently! Chuck Sheetz, who has worked on *The*



The popular Cartoon Network TV series, *Powerpuff Girls*, aims to take over theatres with a new feature-length animated film directed by show creator Craig McCracken. © Cartoon Network.

Simpsons and *King of the Hill* before joining Disney, should ably direct. *Recess* (the series) is by no means a stinker and has an audience, but look for an earlier release starring cartoon youngsters to sweep this feature under the rug(rats) in terms of box office gross. Some good promotion by Daddy Diz might knock a few more dollars into the turnstile tills, but after this feature, school will truly be out for the *Recess* gang. Predicted gross: \$12 million.



Recess: School's Out sends television's favorite troop of fourth-graders to the theatre for more animated antics!

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Shrek (DreamWorks/PDI).

Projected release: May, 2001.

This tale of a chubby green ogre who fights on the side of justice has had a choppy production history. The ogre's original voice, Chris Farley died. Another major character, the princess, was to be voiced by Jeanane Garofalo but she left the project. Director Kelly Asbury literally switched horses and ended up on DreamWork's



DreamWorks/PDI's Shrek, based on the picture book by William Steig, follows the quest of a no-nonsense ogre befriended by a wise-cracking donkey who ventures to save a beautiful princess. © DreamWorks/PDI.

Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron instead. Mike Myers and Cameron Diaz eventually filled the vacated voice roles, and a co-directing team consisting of Andrew Adamson and Victoria Jenson finally took the reins. Eddie Murphy signed on as the voice of an ill-tempered but loyal donkey, and *Shrek* soldiered on into its fourth year of production. Animation insiders indicate that DreamWorks recently killed their plans for showing the film in IMAX widescreen 3D format, due to the additional production costs. The only question that remains is, will this movie be worth all the effort? There are many good reasons why the film *should* do well, but in watching the trailer, I somehow came away with the impression that *Shrek* might not fulfill expectations. To begin with, there were far too many in-jokes aimed at Disney, Eddie Murphy's shtick sounded distressingly familiar, and the fairy-tale setting seemed antiquated. Finally, the CGI-generated characters did not look especially

notable, Shrek in particular. The audiences will ultimately decide, but don't be surprised if this film turns out to be the *Dark Crystal* of 2001. Predicted gross: \$26 million.

Next month, undoubtedly battered and bruised by studio insiders e-mailing me with their opinions about these predictions, I shall return to more typical commentary. Until then, a most happy and healthy New Year (Predicted gross: 365 days) to my cherished readers.

Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman is a longtime student and fan of animation. He lives in Anderson, Indiana.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Outside the Bubble: What the Main Street Papers Say

by Joan Kim

Here in the animation community, we hold high expectations for the animated feature film to break out of its “kid’s only” realm. However, we, and our readers, might be a bit biased. Therefore, we went out to the rest of the news community to hear what they had to say. Finding the entertainment editors and movie reviewers from cities across the U.S., we heard their views about animation, and how they feel their readership — a readership most familiar with Disney — regards animation.

What is the main street speak about animated features? Are we breaking out of the “kids only” mold yet? These home town gurus with their ear to the ground break it down for us and tell us we still have a long way to go...



Kevin Cox, Datebook Editor
The Des Moines Register, Des Moines, Iowa

Animated feature films are viewed very highly, especially in Disney’s case. Adults have come to expect high-quality, entertaining stories that they can take children to see. DreamWorks also has shown promise with *The Prince of Egypt* and *The Road to El Dorado*. Other studios’ films haven’t been so lucky (*Titan A.E.*, for example), but they can’t all be successful. The success goes beyond standard ani-

mation though, as the *Toy Story* movies have shown the promise of computer-animated movies.

“The animated feature film is beginning to evolve out of the “kids only” realm, but it hasn’t gotten very far yet in the eyes of the general public.”
— Kevin Cox

I’ve seen only a few attempts at catering animated films specifically to adults. *Princess Mononoke* was the latest I can think of, and it was only successful on a small scale. Most of the adult-oriented animated fare has been on cable TV and direct-to-video, with many of those features based on comic book heroes like Batman and Spawn. In terms of animated films for adults and kids, films like *Toy Story* have been successful. Overall, I think the animated feature film is beginning to evolve out of the “kids only” realm, but it hasn’t gotten very far yet in the eyes of the general public.



Larry Toppman, Film Critic
The Charlotte Observer, Charlotte, North Carolina

I think that box office totals

show us that unfortunately most people regard animation as primarily for children. Good animated films that offer non-kid content, although they might be kid-friendly, are not really for kids and tend to get overlooked which I think is unfortunate. My feeling is that animated movies are for a wide, wide range of people and it is actually my favorite genre. I’ll try not to get on my soap box, but if I had to take one genre to a deserted island that’s what it would be.

I think animated films can be made that satisfy children and adults on different levels. Even something as simple as *The Emperor’s New Groove* does that. It has humor for kids and humor for adults, but I think adults tend to ghettoize them.

I’m a dreadful predictor, but I think *Emperor’s New Groove* will do well. Obviously Disney’s name is the most potent selling point that you can attach to any kind of film, mainly any kind of animated film. The main interest in it is that there is a huge demand for the Disney name regardless of what is being offered under it. So, I think it will do well — whether or not it grosses as high as some of the more kid-friendly movies like *Tarzan*, I’m not too sure, because it isn’t particularly directed at young children.



Jean Prescott, Marquee Editor
Marquee Entertainment Guide
The Sun Herald, Biloxi, Mississippi

I think that people are interested in feature animation. My experience is certainly with Disney movies. Even *The Emperor’s New Groove*, which I understand had a lot of production problems and

changed gears mid-stream, has parents taking their kids to see these movies just because if they don't the kids won't stop nagging them. But I think movies like *Chicken Run* and even *Emperor's New Groove* are getting away from the "kid only" realm. With Disney movies – why look at Robin Williams in *Aladdin*! I laughed so hard at that movie — at things I know my grandson didn't have the slightest idea of what was going on. These multi-level jokes where you've got to keep mom and dad from falling asleep and pulling their hair out [really work]. So you have to put in some inside jokes in there and keep in mind we're up to our elbows in red-necks — and I say that lovingly.

I think that people across the board enjoy them whether it's a Disney movie and you take the kids or not. I don't think they see it a couple of times the way teenagers go back to see their *Dude, Where's My Car?* movie, but I think that animation is well received. I see loads of people who like *Wallace and Gromit* and made the connection to *Chicken Run* as being done by the same people, plus it was enough to get even the so-called elitists out there who might not go and see a Disney movie. It is becoming something that adults go and see and don't feel like they have to have the token child with them so they don't feel foolish. They watch *Futurama* on TV and they watch *The Simpsons*, of course, and that's not silly. The single guys in this newsroom will carry on about the latest celebrity voice on *The Simpsons*, so yeah, I think it's not just for kids.



Jennifer Cooley, Entertainment Editor
El Paso Times, El Paso, Texas

I think it definitely is evolving. With *Titan A.E.* my husband saw it and really enjoyed it. I wasn't able to see it with him, but it sounded like it was very much an adult film, more than just a kid's cartoon. That's a good example of how it is definitely evolving. People are starting to learn, especially with what's on TV now, that cartoons or animation doesn't have to be just for kids. Really, like with *Looney Tunes*, it started out more for adults than how people view it now.

"I know a lot of adults without children who went to see *Rugrats in Paris*..."
— Jennifer Cooley

I think audiences receive animation well. I know a lot of adults without children who went to see *Rugrats in Paris*, because they enjoyed the first one so much and enjoy watching the cartoons on TV. People are enjoying animation and are more likely to see all sorts of animated movies than before. Part of that I think is because Disney has done such a good job with movies like *Aladdin* and *Lion King* putting in adult stuff along with stuff that their kids can enjoy. So they got a taste of that through their kids and realized, 'Hey, I don't have to borrow someone's kid to go see the movie.'



Ron Cowan, Writer/Reporter,
Statesman Journal, Salem, Oregon

Obviously, they're doing a lot of new things with animation techniques, particularly with computer animation as seen in the two *Toy Story* movies. *Emperor's New Groove* has more of a pop look to it by contrast and it is the more traditional cel animation. But I think that people like this new [amount of] variety. The studios are showing that there's not just the classical Disney style of animation anymore. The people that make animated films are reaching out to a broader audience. It's not just for kids anymore, which makes sense. Parents have to bring the kids and [the filmmakers] want films to reach a modern audience and a more diverse audience.

Not all of them do well, but there have been some examples at the box office, like *Titan A.E.*, that had some unusual animation. However, for the most part, particularly when films have the Disney name, and now the DreamWorks name, they are finding an audience. Audiences still tend to look for brand names.

Joan Kim received her B.A. in English Literature from UCLA and currently is the editorial administrator for Animation World Network. Previously as a graphics consultant she produced several company reports and manuals and continues to pursue an education in computer graphics.

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Beyond Good and Evil: Piotr Dumala's Crime and Punishment

by Chris Robinson

"...[C]an it be that I will really take an axe and hit her on the head and smash her skull.... slip in the sticky, warm blood.... Lord, can it be?"



All images from Piotr Dumala's film *Crime and Punishment*. © Piotr Dumala.

Turning books into animation is nothing new. Virtually all of Disney's early features were adapted from books. The Russians were also especially apt at adapting books without getting the rights first (e.g. Fedor Khitruk's *Winnie the Pooh* and Alexei Karaev's Dr. Seuss takes, *Welcome* and *The Cat in The Hat*). More ambitious adaptations include Jan Lenica's bizarre take on Ionesco's absurdist classic, *Rhinoceros*, Svankmajer's *Faust* and Alexander Petrov's recent *The Old Man and The Sea*. Some work well, others do not.

Now it's one thing to adapt fairy tales, plays and novellas, but it's an entirely different task when one is dealing with a mammoth work like Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Cinema has already attempted a number of adaptations most notably by Josef Von Sternberg and Aki Kaurismaki.

Most recently, Polish animator Piotr Dumala, already well known for existential films *Kafka* and *The Gentle One* (based on a Dostoevsky short story) tried his hand, literally, at Dostoevsky's novel. While it's not the first animation attempt at *Crime and Punishment* (in 1999, student Zack Margolis made a short but inspiring take on it called *A Trip to the Building*), it is by far the most ambitious.



The cinematic temptation is obvious. For all its multi-layered philosophical, social and economic critiques of Russian society and humanity in general, *Crime and Punishment* contains all the tension and suspense of a Hitchcock film. As with *Shadow of A Doubt*, *Rope*, *Frenzy*, or even *North By Northwest*, to name a few, we know almost immediately who committed, or in the case of *North by Northwest*, who didn't commit, the foul deed. Like Dostoevsky, Hitchcock implicates the viewer in the crimes (e.g. the voyeurism in *Rear Window*, the shower scene in *Psycho* or the murder in *Rope*). Throughout the course of the works, the viewer/reader must live



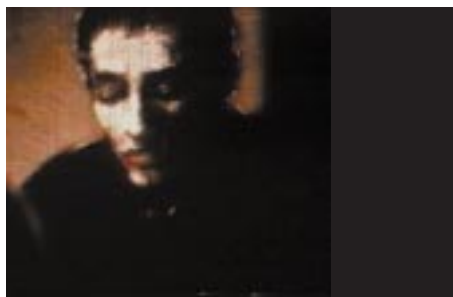
with what it knows. The tensions evolve out of this self-awareness. With our implication comes a variety of mixed messages that shuffle and confuse our own moral values and sense of right and wrong. Despite his monstrous actions, we (well, at least I) do not want Raskolnikov to get caught. Not only are we a witness to the crime, but also aware of the motivations behind it. The same can be seen in *Psycho* and *Shadow of a Doubt*. And despite its mythical and intimidating reputation, *Crime and Punishment* reads like a mystery novel. Indeed, the book was originally a serialization for newspaper readers.

"Man gets accustomed to everything, the scoundrell!"

The Distillation of Story

Dumala it seems also picked up the Hitchcock theme. *Crime and Punishment* opens with a marvellous Saul Bass inspired credit sequence. Thumping, repetitive piano notes accompany the reddish brown visuals that appear in and out of shadows. In between, we see what is almost

an overture of images (including the murder) revealing in an almost Brechtian style what exactly we can expect to see in this film. The fusion of red and brown throughout the film captures the violence and griminess of this sick world, while the elliptical, paranoid, dimly lit images perfectly capture the increasingly blurred line of dream and reality in Raskolnikov's disturbed mind. As with the novel, the crime is very much an afterthought. What interests Dumala is less the crime and more the emotional and mental state of this troubled soul before and after the murder. This is not Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and nor should it be. Adaptations, like essays, should attempt to be personal recreations of the feelings inspired by the adapted work.



Unfortunately, Dumala has been criticized for his apparently unfaithful translation. "People wanted a standard adaptation. People expect to see what they read in the book. This is something else so they feel cheated. It was not my aim to copy the book. I was really close to the book. I took one level of the book. It's not possible to show everything from this book. I got what I wanted." Dumala's film takes only the main plots: the killings and meeting Sonia. This is not a tale of evil or the like in St. Petersburg. "This is about love and how obsession can destroy love. In our life we are under two opposite influences to

be good or bad and to love or hate."

Dumala limited the film to five characters: Sonia, Raskolnikov, the old lady, and the old man who is always peering from the shadows. He also created a new character based on the dream that Raskolnikov has of himself as a young boy trying to save a horse from a severe beating. "I felt that I could make another hero who can exist like an angel representing his innocence."

What interests Dumala is less the crime and more the emotional and mental state of this troubled soul...

"Occasionally he would stop in front of a summer house decked out in greenery, look through the fence, and see dressed-up women far away, on balconies and terraces, and children running in the garden. He took special interest in the flowers; he looked longer at them than at anything else."

An Affinity

Dumala worked for 3 years on *Crime and Punishment*, but he was introduced to the book in secondary school. "I was very moved when I read this story about a 20-year-old good guy who wanted to kill someone without any reason." The idea of a young man struggling to find his limitations

appealed to Dumala, who in typical teenage fashion, was drinking too much, causing trouble and fighting with his parents. Beyond the juvenile attraction, there was something much deeper in the book that embraced the young Pole. The atmosphere in *Crime and Punishment* is one of dirt and scum. Everyone is dirty. They live in dirty houses with dirty children and have dirty thoughts. We see criminals, prostitutes, low lifes; the dark side of society. This was a world very familiar to Dumala. He grew up in a poor district of Warsaw with "lots of criminals living in the court." The courtyard was built in 1938 but was destroyed during WW II. "Many people were killed in this area. My childhood was among these surroundings. It was dark poetry. People were living in ruins. A single mother with two kids lived in the basement, while another family occupied the top part. Criminals were fighting everyday. There was blood everywhere. Prostitutes lay in the stairway shitting on the stairs." At the same time, Dumala, in love with a school girl, had his Sonia within this landscape of darkness. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dumala "found a book about my life."



At 15, Dumala was not mature enough to make a film of *Crime and Punishment*. Ten years later, Dumala had started making comics consisting of about 300 drawings. "It was the best draw-

ings I'd ever made in my life, so after I thought about a film. My professor said, 'You should do *Crime and Punishment*,' but it was too early for me." It would take Dumala another 17 years, making hundreds of films before he was ready to make the film of his life.



The Technique

Dumala is, of course, already a well-known artist on the international animation circuit and his work is acclaimed for its philosophical themes but especially for his innovative plaster technique. His technique involves the use of slabs of plaster covered with normal glue (with hot water to make the surface stronger and smooth). Once dry Dumala scratches on the plaster with sandpaper and paints it with oil paint. "It goes very fast. I put the paint on the surface and it's absorbed very quickly. I scratch on it with a sharp tool and can achieve very nice effects from dark tones to white plaster. The animation goes onto one piece so I make one drawing and change it on the same plaster and repaint it."

Dumala invented the technique in 1983. "I had a piece of wood covered with a special preparation — I kept it as a lesson of technology from art school — and I covered the wood with brown oil paint as background — I always liked Dutch painting and I knew they covered their paintings with black — I really liked this and

scratched it with a needle. It was an illumination. It was possible to scratch and make a drawing. I could continue this and make a film." After one year at the Academy of Fine Arts, Dumala made two films [*The Black Riding Hood* (*The Black Hood*) and *Lycantrophy*] using a traditional drawing style, before using the new technique on his next film, *Flying Hair*. "It was a fantastic technique. Everything was influenced by this technique. It was smooth and poetic and black." While the first two films were done on a white background, *Flying Hair* was made on a black background. "This started my series of black films. So all films take place at night or between night and day. It's not possible to explain the time of day. Is it real light or dark sun?"

His technique involves the use of slabs of plaster covered with normal glue...

The process is time consuming and Dumala never quite achieves the most desired effect. "There are no line tests. Everything is done the first and last time." With the life of a new image, comes the death of the old one. "It's really destroying my mind. It's like killing your own children. Only what I get is the effect on the screen. The movement. I'm very much linked to my drawings. Sometimes you still have some of the past drawing and parts of the next one. It's something really interesting, but you can't keep it. I

work slowly to keep it as long as possible. So I'll go to the bar and eat something and then it's time to destroy it. It's a punishment."



If there is a crime to go with this punishment, it comes courtesy of the film's soundtrack. Faced with deadlines, Dumala had only days to complete the soundtrack. "There were technical problems and I couldn't start earlier. When I finally went to the studio I had two nights. I couldn't see the result until Ottawa [where the film premiered in September 2000]."

Fortunately, the completion of *Crime and Punishment* was mildly therapeutic for Dumala. "When I was finished I felt like after the crime. I knew that something was passed. I am free of an idea that I was keeping for twenty years. It is done. It's over. I felt free to make something else." Old women the world over are rejoicing.

Chris Robinson is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

The Philosophical Stone of Animation

by Piotr Dumala

First of all I would like to say what made me write the present text and explain why I chose this particular title. A stone is a symbol of existence, coherence and accord with oneself. Seemingly changeless and inanimate, it nonetheless contains — symbolically — the deepest creative power. It is an abode of the gods and has prophetic qualities. For the alchemists the philosophical stone represents a union of opposites. According to Jung, alchemists did not look for a deity in matter but “produced” the deity through the process of transmutation.

I would hate to ascribe exaggerated significance to what the making of an animated film essentially means to me. However, the first impression from twenty five years ago, when the cat that I had just drawn came alive, as well as many thoughts that keep coming to me during my solitary work under a camera, make me feel more and more strongly that I am dealing with something close to magic. That “something” consists in discovering or rather producing existence, motion, life; in extracting motion from between the grains of immobility, since motion is but an illusion, a conjecture produced by our mind through the medium of the eye. When I saw the cat built from dozens of motionless pictures run across the screen, cower before a boy who was offering it a bowl of milk and

finally run away, leaving the youngster disappointed, I felt the joy of a scientist whose experiment has worked. At that time I called it, “The first twitch of the hand of Frankenstein’s monster.” A miracle had happened, one form of energy was transformed into another, immobility gave rise to the motion of figures endowed with the qualities of sentient beings.

The comparison with alchemy has dawned on me just recently, while I was busy getting prepared for my next film, inspired by the life of John Dee, a sixteenth century magician and scientist. All at once I saw my work as an activity akin to alchemy in more ways than one.

Sitting with a camera in my basement and drawing the last scenes of *Crime and Punishment* I suddenly wrote on the backside of the screenplay: “Animation is alchemy. For if we admit that the world is revealed to us through motion and change (even Buddhist texts say that change is the essence of existence, that nothing is permanent), it is the animator who finds his way to the mysterious machinery from which all motion results; it is the animator who employs that machinery to his own ends (...). The real world enters the realm of change and is transformed therein. Using motionless pictures in lieu of elementary particles the animator builds the kind of motion that has



Piotr Dumala. © Danilo Giannini.

never happened in reality but is now revealed to us on the screen due to a visual illusion. In a live-action movie the camera registers real motion, ‘fishing out’ of its continuous flow the necessary number of phases. In an animated film it is the other way round: the author builds motion from individual, motionless images and it is only the viewer who provides the impression of continuity. The emotions and feelings present in such an animated picture, as well as the extreme condensation of time that occurs, make it very intense; although the viewer may find that intensity exhausting, it helps the author put a lot of substance into a surprisingly short projection. Of course, I am only concerned with films in which the author takes himself, his subject and the viewer very seriously. Commercials or movies of little artistic value, made as an entertainment for children or adults, can be likened to stands in

a market where charlatans traffic in their cheap wares.”

Alchemy began to develop in the third and fourth centuries as a symbolic process in which the obtaining of gold was tantamount to a transformation of the secular into the spiritual. Gold symbolised enlightenment and salvation. The alchemical process can be summarised as follows: analyse that which you are, perform the dissolution, do not be discouraged by the enormity of your toil and when you finally obtain the power, use it to carry out the union. Incidentally, what I find quite striking is an analogy between this principle of alchemy and a tendency that has become quite widespread nowadays, but had always been vital to humans, namely, the desire to discover in oneself the deepest religiousness and to attain enlightenment — this being effected by various techniques of meditation — or to free oneself from neuroses and become psychologically integrated in the course of a long, difficult and painful process of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis.

The comparison with alchemy has dawned on me just recently...

I have to admit that I am quite surprised and even embarrassed, seeing where my reflections on the modest profession of an animator have led me. However, the work to which I have devoted thousands of hours

is not merely something that I do for a living, so I feel strongly moved to comprehend its deepest essence and mystical dimension.

Having compared the making of an animated film to the process of an alchemical transformation, I now notice another similarity between the two.

When we create motion and in this way tell a story, we can show a particular unreal situation and by the same token directly present a vision taken from imagination, employ a language which is normally used by our thoughts and dreams, make the impossible physically visible and thus — possible. We allude here to the language of symbols, metaphors, fairy tales. We make childish dreams come true, those dreams where objects (or toys) come alive, changing their shape and identity before our very eyes, the laws of nature are transgressed and magical events take place.

As a child I always preferred animated films to live-action movies. In an animated film the magician does not wear a fake beard and no actress has to pretend to be a princess: the princess is real and so is the magic. The very stuff that such films are made of is magical. Besides, I experience all the old silent films as horrors, since not a single person who moves around on the screen is still among the living.

The singular language of animation can be defined as a very primeval form of communication which does not originate from the intellectual or linguistic thought structures. It is a language of the gesture, image, pantomime, a plastic symbol subjected to a very strict regime of temporal sequence, that is, to editing. Unlike live-action movies, it is dis-

connected from reality, in which it has no direct equivalents; it tells its own truth, nevertheless, as an emanation of pure imagination. Just like Chinese script, which has grown out of a particular image and through a process of abstraction which has given it universal meaning.

I have to admit that I am quite surprised and even embarrassed, seeing where my reflections on the modest profession of an animator have led me.

For me the language of animation is a direct expression of our psyche — of the world of myths, dreams and metaphors hidden within us. It expresses something that one can define as the sort of spirituality proper to the psyche of a child, to primitive peoples, to schizophrenics, but also to the wise seekers of the philosophical stone, who (like many artists) profess an attitude of eternal amazement and childishly believe in miracles. Their belief is evidenced by their insane occupation as a magician — or animator.

During the reign of King Rudolph II, black magicians confined to the cramped cubicles in the Golden Lane (also called the Street of the Alchemists) in Prague used their sooty kettles to melt

quicksilver so that it changed into gold. That image seems pretty close to the weird studios of such contemporary animators as the Quay brothers in London, Yuri Norstein in Moscow, Barry Purves in Manchester — or even to my own basement in Warsaw — where an invisible force makes us conjure whole worlds pulsating with mysterious life, using scraps of paper, paint, static dolls and objects as well as the lifeless texture of plaster of Paris.

On the one hand it is a fulfilment of the childish dream to make one's toys come alive, to enter a depicted, invented, fairy-tale world. On the other hand it is an obsessive urge — well-known to magicians and mad scientists — to create an artificial man: a homunculus, a Golem, Frankenstein's monster, a cyborg, a clone.

In the early twentieth century Karol Irzykowski, a Polish thinker and film theorist, intuited that animation would develop into "the real cinema of the future," pure cinema defined as a movement of forms hatched from under the animator's hand, setting no barriers to his imagination. Indeed, even at that time animation did appear in films, employed as magic through which the limits of what was feasible could be transgressed in live-action movies by Méliès or in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. In the pioneering work of Winsor McCay, the animator recreated the catastrophe of the steamship "Lusitania." The animals in the uncanny puppet films of Ladislav Starewicz were also brought to life and made more human through animation. It was the flame of animation that emanated pure energy in Len Lye's abstract films. Nowadays, due to the staggering range of possibili-

ties that computers offer, animators evoke the extinct world of dinosaurs and the breathtaking horror of the sinking of the "Titanic." Whenever high-budget feature films enter the realm of fantasy and overstep the limits of what is possible, the results suddenly make me think of Karel Čapek's 1922 novel *The Absolute Factory*, where a scientist's invention gives rise to a large-scale production of the absolute — a substance which catalyses parapsychological qualities, turning those hitherto unique phenomena into common events. Anyone who has read the novel knows that a world-wide cataclysm followed.

Yuri Norstein once declared in an interview that he felt more like a magician than an avant-garde artist.

Now let us focus our attention on the modest work of animators who spend their days in solitude, sitting in their attics, basements or some such places — that is, naturally, at the fringe of the world.

When Yuri Norstein visited Warsaw more than ten years ago and someone from the audience asked him — in a doubtful tone — about the future of animation, he answered: "Animation is just beginning to develop." I have to admit that those words, or rather Yuri's certainty, made me realise there and then the infinite possibil-

ities at the threshold of which I stood at that time. A direct result of that insight is the film *Franz Kafka* in which I not only had the effrontery to show an animated Kafka but also — to put it more precisely — saw animation as the most perfect medium for the evocation of his spirit. It took two years in a dark basement to produce a sixteen-minute long flash of magnesium and thus tear out from the darkness of non-existence bits and scraps of the writer's life which lasted forty one years. I have fed those images with my own energy during several thousand hours of voluntary confinement.

This recollection of my work on Kafka leads me to the last question that I would like to discuss — namely, to certain animated films in which the very subject matter clearly proves how self-aware their authors are, showing that they are quite conscious of the aspect that I am dealing with in this text. In other words, they do not overlook the connection between their work and alchemy. I have to limit myself to just two examples.

I remember how Miroslaw Kijowicz, the outstanding Polish animator, commented on *The Street of Crocodiles* by the Quay brothers, having seen it at the 1986 festival in Zagreb: "This is no longer animation but some kind of a mystery play." Indeed, what we see in that film is a long-extinct world resurrected on the screen, or perhaps brought to life by a drop of saliva from the mouth of an old man (could it be God?); that world describes itself as a town filled with "cheap human material," a shoddy imitation, "a photo-montage composed of clippings from stale, last-year's newspapers." The above sentence might perhaps serve as a credo for

the Quay brothers who — enchanted with the early works of Jan Svankmajer and inspired by them — devoted their talents to the conjuring of life out of everyday objects and crippled dolls. Surrounded by dusty stage-sets that whisper in our ears scraps of long-cancelled meanings, the Quays weave patterns of connections which escape our perception like paths dissolving inconspicuously in a forest. Their expert use of scarce light and the depth of focus is akin to the effects employed long ago in silent films.

I am tempted to quote now what Joël Magny, the French critic, said about Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's films: "It is as if the shadows acting in his theatre arose from the screen itself, from the film-strip, to dissolve in darkness later on. Those wavering figures and their ephemeral adventures seem to have been extracted for just one brief moment, with supreme effort, from nothingness and darkness." Murnau was not an animator in the proper sense of the word, of course. But his fascination with the uncanny as well as the precision work that such films as *Nosferatu*, *Faust* or even *The Vogelöd Castle* obviously required seem quite close to an animator's way of thinking in terms of individual frames. Graf Orlok, or *Nosferatu*, as he appears in the film of the same title, has an aura of singular mystery and horror. Some commentators will have it that the character in question was played by a real vampire passing as Max Schreck, meaning "fear." His name cannot be found on any roster of actors' names of that time. His uncanny movements are almost identical to those of an animated puppet.

Experimenting with the

movement of inanimate objects, light and optics in their animated films, the Quay brothers have noiselessly crossed over to the realm of live-action movies, working with undiminished concentration and studying the mysterious relationships between the world of live humans and their acquired gestures on one hand and the surrounding stage-sets made of objects on the other. All of this is done in the brothers' feature film *The Institute Benjamenta*.

**I have fed
those images
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The Quay brothers were inspired by metaphysical European writers: Bruno Schulz, Franz Kafka and Robert Walser. Yuri Norstein decided to recreate the fantastic atmosphere of Gogol's stories. He made Akakij Akakijewicz Baszmaczkin, the main character from *The Overcoat*, genuinely, pulsatingly alive. The subtle psyche seems to shine through the figure that Norstein has created on the screen. Just a few seconds into the projection we forget that there is any "animation" involved and start feeling as if we were spying on some living creature in its intimate world, where it goes about its business with singular innocence, like a tiny animal deep in its little burrow.

Yuri Norstein once declared

in an interview that he felt more like a magician than an avant-garde artist. I can readily empathise with the passion hidden in that statement, with the desire to give life to the beings that one creates, not caring to place oneself in any sort of context with regard to the general trends along which art develops. I think that the above-quoted remark made by Murnau fully reflects an important quality of Norstein's work in which the author by the power of his talent reveals to us "with supreme effort" and concentration a live world that no human eye has seen. The creative properties of darkness quite obviously come into play there: as soon as a dim beam of light briefly illuminates the ceiling, detecting a small cat-like animal that runs across a girder, the viewer feels that the whole zone of darkness is saturated with an invisible presence which can take shape at any moment due to a sudden flash of light.

The characters of Akakij Akakijewicz, his housekeeper and his cat, as well as the snowy streets of St. Petersburg, seem like a vision produced through the alchemical process of transmutation. At the bottom of a black kettle a gleam of pure gold appears.

One could quote here the names of other artists: Susan Pitt, Igor Kovalyov, Raoul Servais, David Borthwick, Piotr Kamler, Jerzy Kucia or my ex-students, Agnieszka Wozniczka and Annica Gianini. All of them — just like those mentioned earlier — treat animation as a medium of metaphysical inquiry, proving the seriousness of their work with titanic effort and concentration. Whoever begins to compile such a list runs an obvious risk: it is difficult to stop adding new names, but the only people I

can talk about are those whom I have come to know closely. I am sure that everyone would present a slightly different circle of artists with whom he or she feels connected to by some kind of affinity.

I have noticed that none of the films that I had in mind when writing this essay uses dialogue or any sort of commentary; some of them are completely silent. Maybe words are too unequivocal, maybe they disrupt the mood of mystery, defile the purity of a process which is as self-governed as flowing water, growing plants, moving animals, a chemical reaction, an alchemical transmutation.

Although my thoughts on the connection between animation and alchemy are naturally

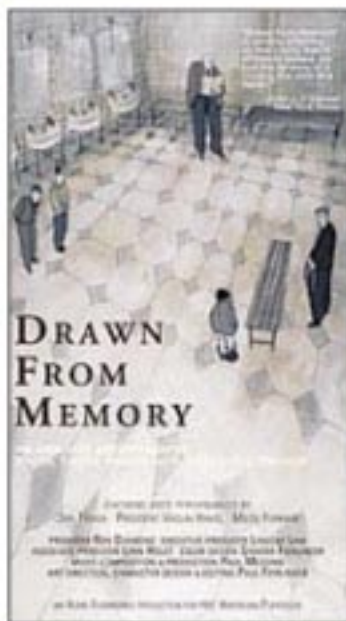
biased, I hope that the above comments can be interpreted as universally valid. I also believe that they can inspire further reflection on this subject. But here is where my own reflections end.

Translated by Michal Klobukowski.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Piotr Dumala is a Polish director, animator, screenwriter who has produced several award-winning films, including Gentle Spirit (Lagodna), Walls (Sciany), Franz Kafka and Crime and Punishment. Recently he has animated dozens of episodes of Nervous Life, a series for television, and teaches animation at the Film School of Lodz in Warsaw. Dumala is also a writer of short stories and essays, a poster designer (he won the prize for best poster at the Annecy Festival in 1993) and an illustrator of books and journals. He is also a guest professor at the Komstaff Animation House in Eksjö, Sweden, and the Film School in Lodz, Poland.

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--Carrie Rickey
The Philadelphia Inquirer



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Illustration by Andreas Hykade.
Courtesy of Chris Robinson.

Animation Festival Travel Tips #1: Waiting

by Chris Robinson

S'not really travellin' since it's mostly waiting. Waitin' for ticket. Ticket. Waitin' for departure day. Waitin' to get to airport. Waitin' in line to check in. Waitin' to do security. Waitin' for boarding. Waitin' for aisle number (strangely, despite having reserved/designated seats, folks be racin' to the plane. What for?) Boarded. Waitin' for those slow fuggers to get their asses out of the aisle so ya can sit down. Seated. Waitin' for takeoff. 1. Backout. 2. Taxi (usually gotta wait for a few planes). 3. Finally in the air. Now...waitin' for cruising level. Cruising. Waitin' for drinks. And you're waitin' to die most of da time. Food dislodges thoughts of death. Waitin' for pick up so you can lift your tray. (Wishing that shitheel in front would move their seat up so your foiled dogmeat isn't jammed in your nose.) Checkin' the screen ta see how far. Movie starts. Death thoughts subside again. Crappy movie but you're *lovin'* it 'cause the 2 bottles o' red has hit ya twice da speed. Bad comedies make you roar. Bad dramas make you weep like a Hilton shower. Meanwhile from begin ta end you're always waitin' to doze. Never comes. Movie ends. Windows open. Over the

sea. Not much more waitin'. But still you're waitin' for initial landing. Waitin' for collection of earcovers. Blankets. Pillows. Crap. Waitin' for final approach/landing. Bing. Waitin' to touch down.

Screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
ecccccccccccccccccccccchhhhhh-
hhh...THUUUUUUUUUUUMMMM
MMMppppppppppp.

Landed. Waitin' for gate arrival. Yeah, yeah...we know wait 'til the captain switches off the seatbelt sign. (Always a few silly fuggers scrambling in the aisle like theys never done dis 'fore.) Bing. Here. Madness. Chaos. Like movin' round in a closet. Waitin' for open doors. Open. Waitin' for movement. Movin' but waitin' for usually 4-6 folks who stop dead on to grab a HUGE bag (shouldn't even be there) from above. Off. Walkin'. Walkin'. Liberation? Nope. Customs. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Waitin'. Officer. Likes he/she waitin' to make you wait. FACADE of POWER ends. Waitin'. (Lesson #1: Be damn sure to bring only carry on...you can do it and don't risk losin' luggage...lost mine least 4-5 times.) So there ya are. Waitin' for the trol-

ley da roll. Rollin'. Anticipate direction and locate the bag entrance. Once done, move there. Waitin' for ya bag. Got it. Exit. Freedom. Nope. S'another uniformed jerk. They wave ya by. Ah, the doors. Hopes. Dreams. Anticipation of the (k)new. Now scenario varies significantly.

Scenarios:

1. Friend arrives giddily, tearily waving, huggin' and takes you to their small Euro car.
2. Sign carrying stranger arrives. Feigns excitement. Follow them through a parking lot. 'Nother one hour drive, half tanked making talk with a stranger.
3. No one. On your own. Taxi. Train. Bus. (Steal a car?)
4. 'Nother connection.

Now given that cartoony parties are held in remote off da wall areas (Annecy, Ottawa, Hiroshima, Baden, Brisbane, Utrecht), you can basically assume that....spite arrivin'/landin' you got at least 'nother one hour or so 'fore getting to your hotel. Ok...so you're in a moving vehicle. Waitin' resumes. Waitin' to get to town. Waitin' to get to the hotel. Hotel. Farewell to stranger. You're cloudy now...really screwed up...like ya been last one home from *the* party. Waitin' for reception. Least 'nother five minutes (assuming you're booked)...gotta fill the form...gotta pull your credit card...gotta get the key...all dis shit. Ok. Done. Waitin' for 'vator. Waitin' for floor. Waitin'/lookin' for room. Hopefully the damn key works. You're there. Problem is you DEAD to da world and it's only 11 am. You wanna sleep...but you're anxiously awaitin' seein' ya mates. Fug dem. Sleep a little (not too much...aim to stay up 'til your nor-

mal beddie time so you're on track (remain). Course now y'r waitin' ta sleep. Not so easy with da light. Try a hot shower or even a little pull on da pud (as good as sex at this point). Ah to sleep...perchance to...you know.

S'bout 4ish. You feel like poop. Get up. Have 'nother shower or just wet your mug. Get dressed and you're ready ta go. Let the FUN begin.

Upcoming Tips:

- * Airports to avoid getting stuck in
- * The Wonderful World of Booze
- * Cool places to puke.

A list of swear words, insults and

other negative comments for your competition

* Screenings in Annecy

Hottie Animator 'o da Month

Is it wrong to be attracted to someone who made a film 'bout incest?

The Animation Pimp is brought to you by AAA Ladies From Shanghai, servicing the sexual needs of the animation community since August 1999.

Join Chris online in the The Animation Café at:
<http://www.creativeplanet.com/communitycenter/>, a sort of anar-

chistic forum (or variety show if that sounds better) for debates, criticism and commentary about any and all aspects of animation, especially the art of animation (whatever that means).

Chris Robinson is a writer, festival director, programmer, junky and doesn't give a shit about you. His hobbies include horseback riding, pudpulling, canoeing and goat thumping.

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Joshua Seth's 10 Steps to Voice Over Success

by Joshua Seth

"How do I break into voice overs?"

I get asked this question a lot. Whatever the answer is, it isn't merely to "have an interesting sounding voice." It takes a bit more than that. And with that in mind, the good folks at Animation World Network have asked me to elaborate. So here goes, in no particular order:

Be an interesting person

You can only create a character up to the limits of your knowledge and imagination, and probably not even that far. So how anybody who's not an interesting person to begin with could expect to breathe life and color into a character that heretofore only exists in black and white is beyond me. Be an interesting person, full of life and curiosity and questions, and you will be able to find all those qualities in the roles you hope to portray.

Train your voice

Imagine a pianist banging on the same half octave, wearing down the same four keys, all day long and you'll begin to understand how most people treat their voices. The human voice is a beautiful and dynamic instrument. You must treat yours well if you want it to perform. Recording sessions typically last several hours and there can be several sessions in a day, so clarity and stamina are essential. There are many ways to train one's voice: breathing exercises, singing lessons and Alexander

Technique are good places to start. I include the Alexander Technique because the voice is an inseparable part of the whole body and so anything that furthers one's own understanding of how to move and breathe correctly is beneficial for the voice.

Read out loud

I know of no better way to put into practice all the above-mentioned training than to read out-loud. I read fiction, drama, screenplays, magazine ads, just about everything out loud for at least an hour a day. It's important to assume the roles you're reading, not merely to recite them. If you actually dramatize what you're reading, you will begin to accrue a well rounded cast of characters rather than the usual repertoire of imitations and impersonations. Even now, I find that the characters I portray in this way often find their way into auditions and roles of all kinds. There are



Seth voices Tai, the adventurous, soccer-playing leader of the original DigiDestined from *Digimon: the Movie*.
© 2000 Fox Kids. All rights reserved.



Joshua Seth, voice over actor.
Photo courtesy of Joshua Seth.

certain archetypal characteristics that recur over and over, regardless of the type of story that's being told. Even a commercial tells a story. So read out-loud and get comfortable with being a storyteller.

Voice acting is acting

In fact, I think of voice overs as one of the purest forms of acting possible, because you're focusing all of that creativity through only one mode of expression. You can, and will, be anything. It allows for a range of interpretation that's creatively liberating and endlessly stimulating. Think of it as acting, pure and true, and you'll free yourself to perform with everything you have inside: just don't get so carried away that you forget about the mic.

Know the marketplace

Watch cartoons and listen to commercials. Seems simple, but the people you'll be auditioning for have worked on these projects and they can contain clues as to what they'll be looking for in the future. Get to know the names in the credits and the styles associated with those teams of people.

Be able to direct yourself

An actual direction I've received: "There was a bit too much blue in that take. Let's do it again and better, OK?" You can't always rely on your director to have a clear idea of what he wants you to do, and even if he does, you can't always rely on him to effectively communicate that idea to you. Better to have developed a critical ear and a certain objectivity toward your own work. After all, you're hired to get the job done; and when it comes right down to it, it's your performance that will be judged not how you arrived at it. There are some great directors out there, and this is in no way meant to disparage the value of their work, merely to inspire you to develop the capacity to compliment their insights with your own.

Be a student of life, not a student of classes

"Show business is the business of show," said the wise old teacher to the wide-eyed student as he took his money and prattled on into the night. There's no end to the classes you can take as an actor: voice, dance, speech, movement, improvisation and on and on and on. There's certainly a value to proper training, but you must have a clear idea of what your goals are and take it as your own responsibility (not the teacher's) to achieve them or it will all become nothing more than an endless stream of high priced information. You learn from everything in life, but to be a student of life, you must apply those lessons to a larger goal.

Set goals

It's often said that life is about the journey and not the

destination. Bullshit! If you don't ever bother to determine where you're headed you'll only wind up going in circles. Take a little time each day to think about where you're going. Where do you want to be in 5 days, 5 months, 5 years, 50 years? Write these destinations down and revise them from time to time. It'll save you from having to go through a midlife crisis in order to figure them out.



Joshua Seth's voice over success gives him a lot to smile about.
Photo courtesy of Joshua Seth.

Think of yourself as a business

You are a piece of meat. Or a can of dolphin-safe tuna, if you will. You are a product and you don't want to spend your shelf life unconsumed. Every product needs good packaging, placement and marketing. Every product must fulfill a need. Who needs you? Why? How will you call attention to yourself and keep it there? At a certain point in your career, these become questions for your agent, manager and publicist. In order to get to that point, you need to answer them yourself.

Know thyself

It all comes down to this: all you can give to anyone else you must first be able to give to yourself. Be good to yourself. Have respect for yourself and you'll have respect for your profession. Take an interest in yourself and you'll find an endless fascination in others. Everything is a reflection of you: your mindset, your outlook, your desires, your fears. Believe it when someone says that this business is hard to break into and it will be. But know in your heart of hearts that voice acting is in your future, and act accordingly, and the future may be closer than you think.

For more articles about voice overs, acting and casting visit the Animation World Magazine Archives online at:

<http://www2.awn.com/archives> and type in the above key words to get an array of past articles.

Joshua Seth is a voice over actor with the Arlene Thornton Agency in Los Angeles. He trained at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts where he holds a BFA with honors in Film as well as Philosophy. He can be heard as "Tai," the starring role in 20th Century Fox's animated feature film Digimon the Movie. Arlene Thornton & Associates: 818-760-6688.

Note: Readers may contact any Animation World Magazine contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

flinch: The House That Flash Built



by Gregory Singer

Chances are you've already been entertained by the hard work and creative excellence of Flinch Studio. But maybe you haven't met properly. So consider this your polite and privileged introduction to an animation house which is not only surviving the hesitations and half-starts of the new media revolution — but is, in fact, helping to pioneer it.

It's a common, and fair, assumption that San Francisco and New York City are the two hubs of the Internet hubbub. But with clients like Warner Bros., Jim Henson Productions, 20th Century Fox, Disney Online, Adam Sandler and Tim Burton carved into their bedpost, it doesn't require a huge leap of faith or imagination to know that Flinch Studio is doing something right. Founded and functioning by the "sweat-equity" of traditional animation artists, the Santa Monica-based studio is a new media entertainment company located in the backyard of Hollywood.



Tony Grillo, Flinch Studio's CEO/creative director, Mike Viner, Flinch's senior producer and Chris Takami, Flinch's president (left to right). All photos and images © Flinch Studio.

In the Beginning...

The Flinch story may have its beginnings as far back as the ancient, Atari-waning years of 1985. A young up-start kid, Chris Takami, had just gotten a job in the mailroom of DIC. But by 1990, Takami was already producing his own shows, and running his own boutique animation studio, Lil' Gangster Entertainment. Soon after merging with a programming group called Strategic Vision, the two companies became Vortex Media Arts — which was the original fire out of which Flinch's future founders would be forged. Vortex was unique among the companies of its time for creating animation-based and graphically-driven CD-ROM games, churning out such titles as the million-unit seller *Tonka Construction* for Hasbro, *Madeleine's European Adventures* for Electronic Arts and *Virtual Springfield* for Fox's *The Simpsons*. In 1996, Vortex was tapped by Disney Online to create a Winnie-the-Pooh book for the fledgling World Wide Web, and Tony Grillo, an Atlanta-bred animator working on the project, was using FutureSplash to build it. At the time, even in its infancy, Grillo realized the latent promise and potential of the software. In four or five years, he insisted, "This program is going to be huge," and he thought it would behoove him to learn it.

Interestingly, during their work for Disney, the artists and

programmers of Vortex consulted directly with the people of FutureWave, providing technical and artistic feedback. Future Splash, of course, was soon to be bought out by a company called Macromedia, and retooled into the Flash program that we all know and love today. During the last few years of the 1990s, with the market for CD-Rom games slowly saturating, Vortex Media Arts closed up shop, and its principal members went on to explore other directions. Grillo, unsurprisingly, continued to delve into the Flash software, learning how to 'reverse engineer' the traditional animation for which he was trained. Grillo became an expert with the program to the point he was teaching it at the university level, at Santa Monica College's Academy of Entertainment and Technology.



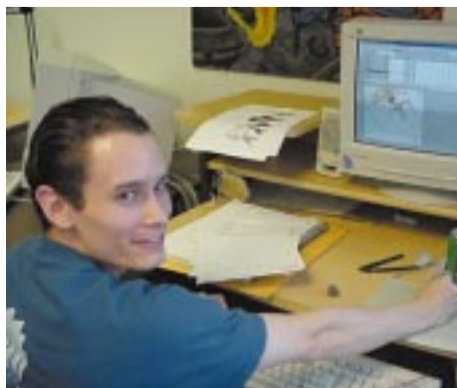
Will Amato, Flinch Studio's art director.

Will Amato, the art director on Tim Burton's *Stainboy*, recalls: "I went to the Academy to scrape the rust off my drawing skills, and to become a traditional paper animator. Tony was such a free-roaming personality. He was making this stuff come alive as he was

demonstrating it, and you could see his delight in it. It was happening in real-time; he was actually making these things come to life before my eyes.”

About a year-and-a-half ago, during the spring of 1999, as the rest of the world was steeling itself for the millennial meltdown, Grillo decided “to get the band back together.” The principals from Vortex Media Arts, Chris Takami, Mike Viner and himself decided to translate their vision of blending technology with animation to the burgeoning Web. The three partners started the company with artists gathered from the Vortex days, a few of Grillo’s “stars” from Santa Monica College and others from a range of diverse backgrounds. Grillo wanted to create an environment where artists would have more control over the content they were breaking their backs on. This was the birth of Flinch Studio with Grillo as CEO and creative director, Takami as president and Viner as the hands on senior producer. There were more than a few people happy and willing to leave the factory-style production of TV and feature animation.

Flinch Studio began its work doing small, freelance projects: the Website and online gaming, for example, of *Doug’s First Movie*; and other short animations for Kellogg’s, the Muppets and Warner Bros. Each project helped to hone the skills and sensibilities of the studio’s artists and programmers. When an assignment came, it was an opportunity for everyone to push the boundaries and explore the possibilities of the medium. In fact, part of Flinch’s success is that they have refused to settle into becoming a one-trick animation house. From complex

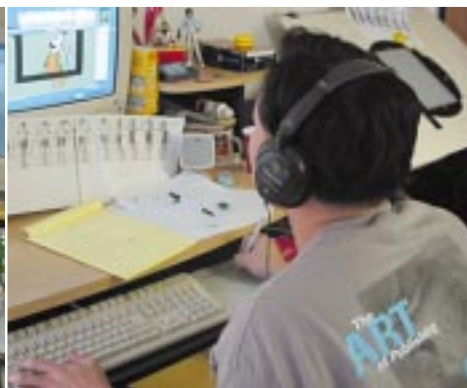


Milton Pool, Flash animator.

Web design, to creating challenging interactive projects (e.g., mixing music tracks live in real-time, with interwoven character animation), it became apparent that “the Internet is only limited by how we can deliver the information to you,” explains Grillo.

Building A Rep

By this time, Warner Bros. was beginning to establish its own online presence, *Entertainment.com*. Previous work with Bugs Bunny had demonstrated to Warner Bros. that Flinch could competently and faithfully care for its properties. As Amato says, “They jealously guard their material. We had handled them well, so they



Flash animator Martin Cho hard at work.

had a good feeling about us.” When Adam Sandler wanted to create a stand-alone animated segment (*The Peeper*) for his then upcoming album, he chose Tom Winkler, from Doodie.com, to be the Webtoon’s director. Tom needed a full-fledged studio to handle the six-minute production and out of their earlier association, Warner Bros. unhesitatingly pointed to Flinch Studio. Tom provided Flinch with the characters and storyboards, and Flinch did the rest. Eighteen million downloads later (the most for any Internet show to date), *The Peeper* created a huge growth curve for the studio artistically and commercially.

Following projects with



A background sketch by Brian Chin, who wears many hats at the studio including background and character designer and layout artist.

Z.com and others, Flinch again found itself in cahoots with Warner's, but this go-around on a project that won't officially premiere until February 2001. Animated by Film Roman, *The Oblongs* is a television series that no one has really seen yet, not even Flinch, and yet there are over thirty sequences on the Internet which Flinch has created "based on model packs, audio recordings and whatever feedback we could get from the show's creators," explains Flinch senior producer Viner.

This kind of collaborative freedom and creative latitude comes from Flinch's growing reputation as an adventurous, high-quality studio, where they are not just given a project to execute, but they are often co-creators in it. Nothing could be more emblematic of this collaborative success than Flinch's realization of Tim Burton's *Stainboy* for shockwave.com.

When Tim Burton wanted to animate for the Web some of the characters from his book, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*, the William Morris Agency introduced him to Flinch Studio. Apparently, it was a natural fit. Burton came to the studio with watercolor designs of his characters, and Amato remembers: "He was really concerned with it not looking like your standard Web cartoon. He emphatically did not want that. He really liked the idea of it being, as Tim put it, 'No big deal.' Meaning — a few artists could do it, on a few computers; he could work with us very directly, in a very informal way; there would be no budgetary commitments, no big overhead producer. It would be almost like we were staying up all night making a funny comic book together. He

liked that do-it-yourself scale."

When Amato did some Flash-based watercolor versions of Burton's work, Burton then realized he was in good hands. Amato continues, "He felt he could relax a bit. I think he felt that Flinch was concentrating and noticing things that he had put a great deal of care into: like texture and line. We were putting other things that a lot of studios might have considered important — like wacky character movements and bouncy motions — on the back burner. If they were ever going to be used, they were going to be used sparingly."



Penny Kaisaki, Flash animator.

While Burton is certainly the catalyst for the show, it has been a very open and evolving process in terms of looks, techniques and storylines. Burton has been very supportive and encouraging of Flinch to be adventurous with the narrative style of the show, and the production has moved forward, episode to episode, in a very challenging and organic way. (Flinch has completed 6 of the 13 scheduled episodes of *Stainboy*, and will resume production once Burton has concluded location filming for his upcoming live-action adaptation of *Planet of the Apes*.)

In commenting on Flinch's success in maintaining the integrity and charm of Burton's vision,

senior producer Viner describes the initial collaboration as a "moment of osmosis." Yet this is, despite its being a lean operation of about 20 people, the secret strength of Flinch Studio — its emphasis on artistic sensibility.

Where There is a Will, There is a Way

So far Grillo's plan of putting the power back in the artists' hands is working and Flash appears to be a major part of this coup. Amato elaborates on the parallels of innovation and revolution in this new digital media: "I think Flash is kind of epochal. A guy like me can create a whole show, conceivably, given enough time, with a program that costs about 250 bucks. And that, to me, is a radical, radical thing."

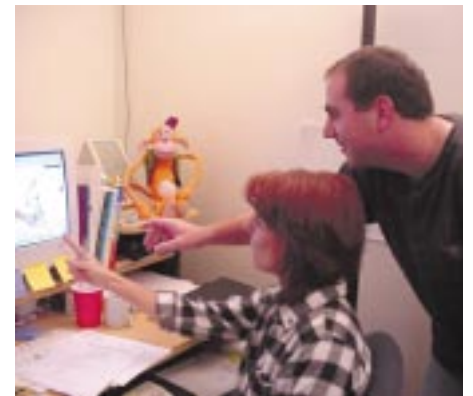
Brian Chin, background and layout artist for Flinch, concurs: "If you can write, draw the pictures, do the sound and put it together yourself, you could do it. That's not to say anybody's going to pay you for it, but at least you can get that far, which is light-years beyond what any of us would have been able to do a mere five or ten years ago."

Brian comes from an almost two-decade history in television animation, most recently at Warner's. The freedom and independence of working in a Flash-based studio is a welcome change as Brian comments: "You can create your own film, right here, you don't need to have a staff overseas." Brian's first animation job was working on Filmation's *He-Man: Masters of the Universe*. He remarks on the irony of coming full circle in his career: "The funny thing is that we used to say how bad it was — the stock system. It was the cheapest, and it's very sim-



Scott Lowe, Brad Bradbury and Cory LaScala, more of Flinch Studio's Flash animators (front to back).

working at Flinch because it is always pushing him, creatively. He agrees that one of the attractions of working at a smaller production house is that he gets to have his hands in a little bit of everything: character designs, storyboarding, keyframing.



Mike Viner, senior producer and Cory LaScala, Flash animator.

ilar with what we try to do with Flash now." But Brian notes that working on low-budget projects has helped him to economize his work, and achieve things in a more efficient manner. "We try to get the most mileage out of something that could be very minimal."

Amato echoes this sentiment: "It's a case where sometimes the limitations are hidden strengths. A lot of times you put a so-called limit on a creative person, and it fosters the most inventive solutions."

With respect to using Flash, Amato remarks, "There's a standard Flash look, which is flat colors placed into single-width lines. But there's this plastic aspect of it, there's the beauty of abstract shapes, of 2D shapes that can be pushed and pulled sculpturally. Flash is this reservoir of effects that has not been challenged much." Amato is quick to point out that the artists at Flinch are doing some jaw-dropping stuff — even people without a deep background in fine arts, "whose talents have just blossomed because of this one tool called Flash."

For instance, Brian didn't have much experience with Flash,

when he first came to Flinch. He practiced intensively for a month, before he officially came on board. "Of course what they do here is not really the type of thing that you would ever find by going through a book," he says.

Lead animator Rob Lilly, who hails from Michigan and studied at the Union's Local 839 American Animation Institute, freely admits to the merits of Flash — how, for example, it speeds up the process of production. But when he was first introduced to the technology, he thought, "No way, I'm not going to touch a computer. I want to stick with traditional animation, the old-fashioned way, pencil and paper." After a time, he relented: "Alright, let's look at this damn thing and see what it can do." Rob still begins most of his work on paper, for inspiration, but about 80% of Flinch's work is drawn directly in the computer. Lilly explains: "Flash is just a new tool for animation, that's all it is. You're going to see more and more traditional animators come to this artform, because there are not that many jobs out there in traditional." Having come from Sony himself, Rob enjoys

Setting Up for the Long Run

Flinch Studio is not only artist-driven, but, in a nutshell, eclectic. Grillo explains: "The principals of Flinch have the widest variety of backgrounds I've seen in an entertainment studio. There are roots in prime-time animation, Saturday morning cartoons, commercials, edu-tainment, broadcast design, underground comics, electronic gaming, independent film, studio feature film, alternative journalism, advertising and industrial video. The combination of knowledge and influences that these past careers bring to Flinch has allowed us to quickly adapt to a decidedly multi-directional industry." Mary Jane Amato for example, who alternately (and with equal grace) wears the hats of chief financial officer, secretary and production coordinator at Flinch (and is Will Amato's sister), comes from a history of ten years in theater, and, most recently, six years at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

If Grillo is, as Lilly describes

him, “energetic, happy and slappy,” then Takami is, in a word, *passionate*. He sees, with the clearest vision and imagination, the future of Flinch – and for him it’s just a matter of stepwise and patiently translating that vision to the television or computer screen.



Johnny Kickass, part of the original character line-up from Flinch's Nickky Teen.

What distinguishes Flinch among online animation studios, and what has helped it to survive the recent Internet shake-out, is that, as Takami explains, “Flinch is not a portal. We didn’t create our studio as a portal.” Flinch does not focus its energy and resources in creating an exclusive channel for people to find and go to. Rather, Flinch provides its services directly to entertainment, Fortune 1000, and educational content companies. Flinch’s goal is to make the Web a more entertaining, engaging and unique place to be. “Websites are generally used to house or to exhibit entertaining content, whereas our belief is that the Websites themselves are part of the content.”

Using its work-for-hire model to evolve with the industry, Takami summarizes Flinch’s vision: “We believe that the future of online entertainment lies some-

where between the games that we play and the television that we watch.” Flinch draws on its strong background in interactive media to produce character-driven, immersive environments, to pull viewers into the world that it creates. The current wisdom is that content online will ultimately be an integration of the old and new paradigms of entertainment, a hybrid of the two styles of media. Content will be interactive when and if you want it to be, without encroaching on your freedom to navigate through an environment as you choose. When Takami demonstrates prototypes of Flinch’s Websites to different groups of people, children oftentimes want to play with and to interact with the characters, again and again; whereas sometimes adults don’t have the time or patience to deal with them. With a click of the mouse, the characters are gone, and Takami acknowledges it’s a balance. Who is the target audience, and what is the experience you’re trying to create for them? The application varies for each client.

Flinch continues to push its research and development in pursuing novel ways to use the Flash software. Moving more toward intensive database-driven strategies of design, coupled with AI (artificial intelligence) programming, Emil Petrinic, Flinch’s inhouse programming and technical genius, explains, “We have basically invented a lot of ways of using the technology and tools: new ways of Flash interacting with a database, different ways of conceptualizing how to interact with the next generation of Websites.” He adds, “I know that others are going in that direction, as well, but we’re putting it together as a

whole, instead of little bits here and there.”

Flinch Studio is also positioned to introduce Flash technology to the traditional animation houses as a viable option for them to produce their shows at a lower cost. Not all cartoons, of course, are suited for Flash, but certainly a lot of them could be achieved therein: *Johnny Bravo*, *King of the Hill* and *South Park* are a few that come immediately to mind.



Michelle Romaine, producer and Rob Lilly, Flash animator.

With projects in the works for J. Walter Thompson, an advertising firm, and 20th Century Fox’s forthcoming stop-motion animated feature *Monkeybone* (bitemy-monkey.com), Flinch Studio takes its work very seriously, in helping to define the model for new media entertainment. Viner expresses his appreciation that companies are taking the risk to explore this new medium, and that they are trusting Flinch with their creative goals: “It’s always good to see people be brave enough to say, ‘Hey, nobody’s done this before, but I think it’s a good idea. Let’s put some money behind it.’”

Regardless of the industry’s present vacillations and hiccups, there will always be a market for animation online. Viner comments, “I don’t think in 2 years, 5 years or 10 years from now, peo-

ple will look back and say, 'I remember that year when there was entertainment on the Web.' It's simply not going to happen. People may look back and remember before broadband was popular, when animation was only three minutes on the Web."

Inspired by a lot of the undersung, underground work being done, Amato remarks, "There are a few Flash artists fighting to get interesting work out there before the corporate gates close on the individual spirit." He adds, "Flinch tries to successfully bridge the two – an independent, creative spirit matched with the needs of a client, which often



Another original Flinch character, Teena Teen from Nicky Teen.

exists in a corporate milieu."

Grillo agrees: "Flinch has been able to maintain a healthy balance of creative and corporate

clientele, and that's not an accident. After all," he concludes, with his characteristically buoyant humor, "if it stops being fun, I'm the first one to bail."

Gregory Singer is an independent animation producer living in a small hut on the edge of the known visible universe. No animals were harmed or consumed in the writing of this article.

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Men In Black Goes Into the Dark

by Jacquie Kubin



Outside Universal Studios Florida's newest attraction — the largest dark ride in history featuring *Men In Black*! All photos courtesy of Jacquie Kubin.

A trip inside Universal Studios Florida's newest attraction — the largest dark ride to date featuring *Men In Black*!

The best entertainment wraps things that we know in new packaging. The Universal Studios Florida theme park proves this by premising its attractions on popular studio films such as *Terminator*, *Twister*, *Jaws* and *King Kong*. Rekindling the real-world mystery of the July 1947 alleged crash of an extraterrestrial vehicle near Roswell, New Mexico and then mixing it up within a 1964 retro-modern-style plaza plucked from the New York World's Fair, *Men In Black (MIB): Alien Attack* is the largest dark ride ever conceived. "The art of making a theme park track attraction is the art of making an assembly line interesting and with *MIB* we have taken the traditional dark ride and put it on its ear," explains David Cobb, Creative Director for *Men In Black: Alien Attack*. "This ride is a people eater and the art form is to

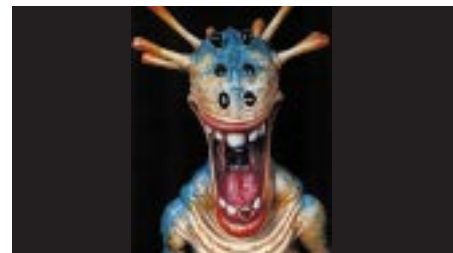
make it unique. With *Men In Black*, the idea was to create a dark ride attraction with repeat ride-ability. Now we have done a 3D ride in the dark before, and our *Spider-Man* attraction is a 21st century dark ride, but *MIB: Alien Attack* is a step back to showmanship and technical flair."

Enter MIB

For the theme park, *MIB* offered itself as the perfect property for its next incantation on multiple levels. It combines theatrical visuals with fast-paced thrills while thrusting its occupants through a life size, interactive video game where the points earned actually affect the outcome of the riders' experience. In addition, the movie enjoyed a broad demographic appeal with its combination of comedy, action, adventure, drama and science-fiction. Cementing the concept was that movie lead actors, Will Smith and Rip Torn, were both willing to participate in the attraction's development. The conceptual phase began in December 1997 with the first ideas of a dark ride emerging in February 1998. The entire development, including designing more than 400 aliens, the story, vehicles, guns and animatronics took from concept to opening day an aggressive 27-months. Able to move between 2,000 and 2,500 people through the ride per hour, the high capacity attraction's pre-

show is timed to be 2 to 3 times the length of the average wait time.

When people enter the experience, they are greeted by MIB Director, Agent Zed (Rip Torn), who apologizes about the phony theme park nonsense that they, as new MIB trainees, had to endure. During the pre-ride "holding" process Agent Zed provides a training lecture regarding aliens that live among humans and MIB's mandate to keep them under control. Trainees learn a little bit about alien spotting, as well as the proper use of the MIB issue guns and the vehicles they will be using during their training mission. In keeping with the movie, MIB facilities and actions are secret, even though they are hidden in very plain site. All of this is taking place in a massive 70,000 square-foot building!



A variety of instantly recognizable aliens compose a large part of the amusement park's new ride.

Then two training vehicles, which operate in tandem teams of 6 people, blast into an interactive video game whose goal is to shoot as many aliens as possible. Game players quickly learn from Agent Jay (Will Smith) that a shuttle carrying some nasty bugs being deported to Planet LV-428 has crashed and those bad bugs are roaming the streets of New York City. Featuring some of the most extensive animatronics ever seen in a dark ride, MIB combatants square off against 127 varieties of aliens in an effort to rack up points, individually and as a

cumulative total for the car. Each of the alien figures has its own animatronic technology, with movement, lighting and sound.

Aliens Get Special Attention

The comedy-based attitude of the aliens, as seen in the movie was important to the design of the ride. "The aliens had to have an instantly recognizable look even as the riders are whizzing by at 4-feet per second," Cobb says. "There is a real art to the design and programming of a visual look that makes the aliens funny and recognizable in the gaming sequence." Inserting alien gags into the ride was the domain of character art director Desiree Soto, who has aliens jumping out of trashcans, exploding out of mailboxes and swinging down from light poles. Huge animatronic aliens straight from the movie including The Twins, whose arm-span is 12' from fingertip to fingertip and a bit more than 5' tall, are featured throughout. The dispatcher alien, the last friendly face seen before you take off on the adventure, is 6' tall and 3' in diameter. "These aliens are human scale and are run on hydraulics and pneumatics hidden beneath skin designed to look funny, slimy, goofy. The challenge here is to make huge industrial robots, like the ones that assemble cars, that are warm, fuzzy and can be continually run for hours every day," says Cobb. The largest animatronic ever assembled by the Universal Studio talents is the ride's finale Big Bug. A warehouse sized alien bug 30-feet high, this bad guy has teeth that are eight to 11-feet long and 20-foot long claws. Part of the bug is sculpted scenery with other elements, such as the teeth, fangs, head and pincers being operated

by a hydraulic the size of a small travel vehicle with enough power to lift a Winnebago at the rate of one time every three seconds. As riders approach the big bug split-second decisions are crucial as they are literally pulled into the "belly of the beast" and Agent Jay encourages them to shoot their way out of the slimy intestinal cavity. Depending on the riders combined skill, they are either given a hero's welcome or a loser's farewell before being zapped with an MIB neuralizer, erasing their memory.



The MIB game-ride encourages riders to return again as every trip is slightly different depending on game performance scores.

The game background, conceived by artist James Pickering, is filled with as many possibilities as New York has city streets. Taking into consideration that the theme park has visited NYC streets within two other attractions — *King Kong* which offers a very realistic and cinematic view of the city and in the real-life environment of the theme park's "Central Park" rest area — the *MIB* attraction is based within a theatrically stylized setting that combines Broadway stage with Technicolor film noir.

One More Time!

While most theme parks are designed to move large numbers of people from one attraction to the next, what may be the most unique aspect of *MIB: Alien Attack*

is the way it encourages riders to rejoin the queue and ride again. "The experience is different depending on which track your vehicle is on and which aliens you shoot," Cobb says. "The ending you will see will change depending on your car's cumulative score. Even the most experienced games won't get the top ranking right away, it takes numerous rides."

Men in Black: Alien Attack is a project that combined an array of talents, from illustration, to painting, sculpting, architecture, aerospace and mechanical engineering. Animators were used for the scene and alien illustrations as well as for the character designs and computer generated animation elements. "I like theme park work because it gives me a chance to be working with industrial elements, movie sets and theater design side by side with tremendous talents," Cobb says. "Working on a project like *Men In Black* is like having the keys to the greatest toy box on the planet and each of these people really put their hearts into their work."

Jacquie Kubin, a Washington, DC-based freelance journalist, enjoys writing about the electronic entertainment and edutainment mediums, including the Internet. She is a frequent contributor to the Washington Times and Krause Publication magazines. She has won the 1998 Certificate of Award granted by the Metropolitan Area Mass Media Committee of the American Association of University Women.

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A Look At Europe's

CARTOON FORUM

with John Bullivant

by Heather Kenyon



John Bullivant. Photo courtesy of TV-Loonland AG.

From September 20 – 23, 2000 Europe's animation movers and shakers arrived in the tiny Swedish village of Visby, a beautifully picturesque patch, to pitch and perhaps fund the latest in animation programs. An initiative of CARTOON, a part of the EU's MEDIA II program which is designed to promote the production of animation in Europe, The Cartoon Forum is a vitally important place for projects to get off the ground. For an inside look on this past year's Forum and how it fits into the rising tide of European production, Animation World managed to catch up with TV-Loonland's Director of Programmes John Bullivant.

John has spent the past months traveling the globe as he attempts to keep up with TV-Loonland AG's aggressive expansion. Here's a brief recap: it all began in April of last year one month after the company went public on Germany's booming



All other photos and images courtesy of Cartoon, the European Association of Animation Film.

stock market. TV-Loonland announced a partnership with Canadian-based television and film company Alliance Atlantis Communications to co-create up to nine new children's series. The German producer then went on to purchase Paris-based distribution house Salsa Distribution, a leader in the Latin market; British animation company Telemagination; and German family Internet service provider FamilyHarbor.de. As if that wasn't enough at MIP-COM in the fall, the company purchased the television production and distribution activities of Sony Wonder, the children's production arm of Sony Music Entertainment.

This transaction included the purchase of New York City's Sunbow Entertainment, which Sony wonder had bought in 1998. But wait! There's more... In December, 2000 a 65% stake in Seoul distribution firm Saerom Entertainment was bought. Saerom is the third-largest video and DVD distributor in Korea and controls a leading Internet film portal, which it has been leveraging as a new means of distribution. Many wondered if the company was spreading itself thin until on Monday, November 6, 2000, TV-Loonland announced that the company expects annual sales to top DM127 million (US\$55.9 million) for 2000 —

which is almost four times its original estimate when the company went public.

Now, I am sure you can see why I telephoned three different continents before finally reaching John as he conducted business in Telemagination's new London offices...

Heather Kenyon: What were a few of the most interesting projects you saw pitched at Cartoon Forum?

John Bullivant: In no particular order, there was a project called *Dominion* that was produced by a U.K. live-action comedy writing partnership called Fireside Favorites. It was terrific. It's a prime-time 15 to 35 year-old audience show that had a very strong design style and good comedy writing. It came from writing originators rather than from an animation studio. For me, it was a kind of *Red Dwarf* meets *Black Adder*, both of which are hugely successful live-action sitcoms in the U.K. It had good character-based comedy elements in a very distinctive visual style and was well presented. Also, it was a strong team that put it together. They had a very entertaining past number of short films that they'd already produced for Channel 4.

HK: And they have a track record if they've already produced.

JB: They have a track record in comedy. Fireside Favorites is one of the most sought after comedy writing companies in the U.K. at the moment for sort of Channel 4 and BBC 2, which is where that kind of prime time animation or late night animation places. It is more likely to be driven by come-

dy writers than it is by animation studios because the people who ultimately commission that kind of programming usually run live-action comedy departments. As in the States and a number of other countries, comedy is driven usually by strong writing teams or production companies that have strong writers within them. Therefore when you introduce animation into those kind of slots they're more interested in your comedy credentials than they are in your animation credentials. The medium becomes second to the originators and the comedy talent. At the other end of the spectrum was *The Koala Brothers*, a pre-school project, in model animation from Famous Flying Films. I think that was one of the strongest pre-school shows presented, beautiful designs, very, very stylish sets, slick presentation, charmingly animated. There was no dialogue presented in the animation but just the way the characters were characterized in the animation made it instantly appealing. That would be number two. Number three was a show called *Johnny Casanova*.

HK: Andy Wyatt.

JB: Yes, which was highly entertaining and amusing in terms of a teenage boy's struggling to come together with his body, sexuality, life, girls and all that kind of thing. The interesting debate was where it would play. What kind of slot it would fit into because your protagonist hero was probably 13-years-old and the argument was he was too near the knuckle in terms of the language and what was actually talked about. The boy ended up with a hamster down his trousers and a girl goes looking for it physically. Girls putting hands

down boys' trousers is not something you can show to a younger audience, but the question was would your target audience of 15 to 35 year-olds find it amusing or is it too close to their own sort of experiences? It's funny for those people who have moved out of that phase of their life but is it still going to be found as amusing for those people who are seeing their stresses and angst played out on screen? But the pilot had a number of people laughing in the aisles. Very simple designs. It was going to be produced in Flash animation by the production company Fictitious Egg and was sponsored by Channel 4. Again if you make people laugh they sit up and pay attention. It was just a debate as to how you would get that placed in broadcasters and around the world especially since it is predominantly a children's market. A lot of the people there wouldn't have been able to schedule it in their air time.

And there's a show called *C.O.W.S.*, which stands for Covert Operatives With Style, which is basically three bovines, very sort of glamorous, who are given special missions in the same way that the three Charlie's Angels get their missions. You know secretly communicated to them. These three very strong characters were amusingly presented and it seems like a very character-based comedy from France Animation. It captured part of the trend of the moment for strong girl driven properties. Girl power is very strong at the moment. Those I would say are my top four.

HK: Everyone's looking for girls' shows.

JB: It's kicked in the last 12 to 18

months where somehow it's been deemed sensible to have a strong female protagonist. It started with things like *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and *Clueless*, and now is starting to move into animation. I think it may run into difficulty in terms of the next 2-3 years. You're going to go, 'Oh, we've seen that. We've done girls in all the possible scenarios,' and then people will go back to something else. But it's about time. Long overdue in some ways. It's more about having an appealing character. But the world is changing. Broadcasters are discovering that the child audience is less dominated by the boy controlling the remote.

HK: Plus more kids have separate TVs now. Gone are the days of fighting for the remote.

JB: Yes, absolutely.

HK: Did you want to talk about your shows?

JB: Yes, because that's partial and biased and boring! We presented a show called *Ponqwiffy* under the Telemagination banner, which we think is a strong show — that's why we took it there — and it's been commissioned by ITV. It's about a group of dysfunctional witches. It tends to play up more their personality and their relationships rather than being kind of like a magic oriented show, with lots of spells and catastrophes like when spells go wrong. It had a very positive reaction. We think it has a lot of potential and there was significant interest afterwards. I think it was one of the strongest shows that was presented there. I don't think I'd be arrogant enough to say it was the best, but I'm pretty sure it will go into production at



Cartoon d'Or nominees Jonathan Hodgson, José Miguel Ribeiro, Benoît Feroumont, Fabien Drouet and Siri Melchior.

the beginning of next year. We're in the business of finalizing the broadcaster interest that followed on from our presentation.

HK: Excellent, make sure we get that press release.

JB: Shall do.

HK: What do you think about the overall selection of projects there, their quality and the range?

JB: I think there was an excellent range of projects chosen, a very strong cross section. Everybody had produced the necessary materials to a high standard. However, it's hard to say because every producer that turns up thinks that they have a strong show. We work in a very subjective industry, so I think it's unfair for me to say, 'The quality was low this year.' I don't think it was one of those Forums where there are two or three shows that absolutely everybody goes crazy over. This Cartoon Forum didn't have that for whatever reasons. It was much more of a mixed reception. Some people liked some shows, other people

didn't like others, but I wouldn't say that meant the quality was lower necessarily. But also you have to have a certain number of things in place like a domestic broadcaster and European support, produce certain materials, then present a pilot. The selection committee is not operating on a, 'We think this is a good project.' They operate on the basis that if you meet these criteria of broadcaster supports, the right kind of materials, an international co-production partner or interest, then yes, you will have an opportunity to present your project. Then they let the market decide.

HK: Projects need to come to the Cartoon Forum with a domestic broadcaster interested?

JB: Yes. They have to have interest from a domestic broadcaster, whichever country they come from, and have support from another European partner, which could be a distributor or a co-producer. There's usually a writer because — while I think you only need one script for the Forum — a broadcaster has to have seen a full



Cartoon Forum attendees enjoy the lawn and courtyard outdoors.

set of scripts or something, to be able to turn around and say, 'I will broadcast this, subject to the successful development of financing.' You have to present a sufficient amount of materials so that others will be interested in coming in or being part of the financing.

HK: So, you are really there to get the last pieces of the puzzle put together.

JB: Depending on who you are determines the company you are looking for, the key pre-sales that will put your series into a greenlight situation. You could be a significant distributor that actually feels fairly confident about going into production, but what you're using the Forum as is an opportunity to present the project to a whole range of broadcasters. One of the things that Cartoon Forum gives the producers is...the table's slightly turned. If a producer has a strong show and it's presented and it's one of those shows with a huge buzz, then you may have three broadcasters from the same territory all of whom would be interested in it. It is one of those very rare occasions where the power lies with the producer. It's

not very often that a producer is in the position to say, 'We presented a show. You know there's a huge buzz on it and you know that your competitors are interested.' It then becomes the seller's market when literally 99 percent of the time it's the buyer's market. That doesn't happen in this kind of open forum anywhere else basically.

HK: Definitely not at MIPCOM, MIPTV where you see booth after booth.

JB: Exactly and there is a definite advantage to having a room full of 100 to 180 people. For it to go incredibly well in that 30 minutes and get a standing ovation at the end, then there's a buzz on the show. It's very rare that that happens anywhere else. Everybody feels that buzz. The producers feel the buzz, the distributors do, as do the broadcasters. I'm not aware of any other forum that achieves that. That's a distinct advantage. Alternatively, you can kill your project in 30 minutes. It is a double-edged sword. If you stand up and make a dog of a presentation and everybody comes in with an enthusiasm, but leaves thinking that the presentation wasn't really

good, you'll have a very hard time. People will walk out talking about your project and what they're saying is, 'No, I don't think so.' As a result it can be instant death because you've exposed it to so many people and effectively killed it in front of them.

HK: Can you see the Cartoon Forums having a real impact on business in Europe?

JB: Yes! There are a number of shows that have been financed through Cartoon Forum. I think it's made a significant contribution to supporting and developing a strong European animation industry and will continue to do so. It's got to evolve because Europe is becoming much more of a significant player. You know there are strong independent media companies like Hit in the U.K., or as we have now in Germany EM.TV., IGEL Media, Greenlight International. France has strong producers but hasn't got those big integrated companies because they haven't had access to the French stock market yet. Therefore their industry is evolving from the small studios that came together say seven or eight years ago and



At the Happy Life press conference: Anita Simovic, Frederik Zandér, Peter Gustaffson and Torbjörn Jansson.

tried to collaborate in order to gain financial independence. But every year there are new people at the market, who are benefiting from something that was set up a few years ago. I've been to a number but I'm not by any means the most long serving attendee. Cartoon Forum will survive and if people bring good shows, there's more strength now in the European market to make those happen. It is kind of leveling the playing field between Europe and North America.

HK: What is the most effective part of Cartoon Forum?

JB: The most effective part of Cartoon Forum is probably the bar. The nicest thing about Cartoon Forum is the one thing that everybody rails against; they always choose some God-forsaken remote place that takes you a whole day to get to! You can guarantee the hotel doesn't have email points and has faxes that turn into some sort of scroll when they finally get them delivered to your room. But basically you're obliged to focus on animation from the European point of view exclusively, with 70 to 90 percent of the key people in Europe who can make things happen. It is quite nice

actually that we're just doing that exclusively for 2-1/2 days. It has a very different atmosphere to MIPCOM. It's much more sociable, much more relaxed. It is still fundamentally sort of business-oriented and a lot of good projects are seen and picked up, but it's the bringing together of all the key people within Europe in what is actually quite a collaborative, as well as competitive, atmosphere. There are debates about shows — from how people contribute, to how a show should be developed — even if they have no vested interest in it. They do it willingly and constructively. That's one of the nicest elements, that people are prepared to do that rather than just say, 'Why would I want to help one of my competitors?' It's not an issue. It's a very small industry, we all know each other and, especially in the U.K., we all socialize with each other as well as compete with each other. I think that's one of its strongest credentials. The more it turns into a MIPCOM the more it loses its uniqueness.

HK: Is there anything you'd like to see changed?

JB: The biggest debate is whether we let non-Europeans into the Forum.

HK: That was my next question and the sort of million dollar question — perhaps literally.

JB: I would like to see non-Europeans allowed who are in the position to invest money in projects. There aren't that many projects that happen purely on European finance. We need money from the rest of the world. No non-European, however, should be able to finesse it to be allowed to present a project. You'd have to toughen up the criteria on which projects get presented, otherwise you'd find that people would shove the work into a European company just to get it exposed. I think you'd have to be quite rigorous in scrutinizing the origins of each project. It's naïve to maintain "fortress Europe" in terms of not allowing anybody else in when I'd say maybe five out of ten European shows need international financing in order to happen either from distribution companies, potential co-productions or broadcast sales internationally. We should be really keen to use other people's money. We should just make sure that the money which Cartoon invests, which is European money, is going to support the generation of European ideas, that originate within European companies. I know that people are very reluctant about that, but people are also very keen to have non-Europeans in. For the first time I think Buena Vista Video was allowed to attend. Again on a pre-school show Buena Vista is in a position to offer a significant source of production revenue. It's naïve to think that they don't find out about the projects, and it's actually healthier for the growth of a project's development and financing for that person to be

there at its inception and put a card down saying, 'I'd be very interested in this. I could offer this kind of money if you can cover three out of four territories.' It empowers the producer. I think it's commercially short sighted now. There were good reasons in the past but now that we're secure and established in what the event is we should move forward [on letting non-Europeans in].

HK: Companies are naturally getting more global now.

JB: Absolutely.

HK: Cartoon Network Europe is almost a completely separate entity than Cartoon Network in the U.S.

JB: They look to buy large amounts of European content, and they're also looking to co-produce just for Europe so I would agree. I think the market has moved on from where it was when Cartoon Forum was initially set up and it needs to move with the times. It may need to be stricter on the criteria for submitting projects. I know it has a hard time keeping the number of projects down because they get



Siri Melchior being interviewed.

pitched about a hundred and I think they can only take about 75. You don't want people to say, 'Time is precious and it's not worth going because I never see anything good.' That's going to be an issue in the future — maintaining people's interest. But you can balance that with as I said exotic places and plenty of good drinking venues. Then most broadcast people will turn up for a couple of days.

HK: It's the same with events in L.A., you get distracted, but when you're in Annecy, you're stuck in Annecy.

JB: (joking) It's a nightmare, isn't it?

HK: (joking along) Oh, it's awful. I hate it with all that good French food, by the lake, in the Alps!

JB: I think it's good to take a little step away from the office and the day-to-day grind of 10,000 emails. It can actually be quite productive in terms of how it liberates your brain and what it allows it to think. If you just keep your nose pressed against the computer screen that's all you ever focus on.

HK: You come back energized from events. How do you think more U.S. people will be allowed to participate in the Forum?

JB: That's a decision for the organ-



Inside the pitching room.



Another look into the pitching room.

izers of Cartoon Forum. I don't know what this kind of unofficial lobby is saying, but I would predict yes. It's just a question of what criteria they'll let in basically.

HK: You're not the only person then saying this would be helpful.

JB: I don't think so. I think maybe it's unfair to say but it's the people who operate on the international stage and understand how the shows actually get financed who are probably more in favor of it. A lot of the smaller producers are scared that they will get squeezed out if they let the big bad North Americans in. They feel like they'll get out maneuvered because they've got smaller resources. I think that's polarizing the debate but that's fundamentally the two extremes. Investors who are not allowed to sponsor projects shouldn't get access to them in advance. They'd only get to see the projects when they are presented which is their motivation to be there. I think that would be a prudent next step that would protect what the Forum set out to do but also allow small independent producers access to money from big players.

HK: It would allow more access to the U.S. market.

JB: Absolutely.

HK: A terribly hard thing to get.

JB: It is. For a director there's an opportunity for him to be picked up by Nickelodeon, U.S. or Disney if he is so-minded or for his studio to be rated and seen. There are upsides and downsides. I'm not saying that Europe has suffered at the hands but American products



Visby in Gotland, Sweden, a beautiful medieval city containing seven majestic old churches interspersed among quaint red-roofed homes, which line the narrow streets inside of the walled town.

have been exported massively into Europe. It's cut across our industry. The industry is changing now so Europe is becoming a much stronger force. The last thing you want to do is shoot yourself in the foot just when the playing field is starting to level out by bringing in the Trojan horse as it were.

HK: How does Cartoon Forum tie in to MIPCOM?

JB: Cartoon Forum is very close to MIPCOM which adds stress actually because the bigger companies, distributors, broadcasters and other players, have to plan two schedules at the same time. It varies, sometimes it's a good thing, sometimes it's not. MIPCOM is a follow up if you haven't done all the business. If there's strong interest in your project you can have those follow up meetings because fairly rapidly everybody comes together again. That's fortuitous in some ways. The danger is if it gets too close. Often you need a month between these things for projects to move on, conversations to be had, things to be fine-tuned so

that you can actually have something new to say, but it ties in very well generally speaking.

HK: For more discussion and to meet again.

JB: Or possibly to finalize a development deal, a co-production deal depending on how advanced the project is and what the appetite for the property is. These things always happen at the next big market. More time in between the two also makes planning your life a damn sight easier. It's a crazy thing, you do have to factor that in because people get fed up. They're trying to go to all these events, organize their lives back home and do the job they're supposed to be doing. There's only so much flying around you can do before you start going mad.

HK: Do you attend Cartoon Movie?

JB: I haven't been. Our chief executive, Peter Volkle, went this year so I don't know that much other than it's the movie equivalent of



A small crowd admires a beautiful ocean view from the host-city of Visby.

Cartoon Forum. It's building in significance — I think it's going to go from strength to strength — and the nice thing is it can attract an adult audience, whereas Cartoon Forum attracts essentially a children's buying audience. The feature film industry covers everything really. You can present family concepts or action-adventure concepts that only play to an older audience.

HK: Do you think the events should be combined?

JB: I suppose you could combine them but you couldn't have them running simultaneously. You'd have to start one and then follow into the other. I think the danger is that it's going to take a whole week and that means you spend a whole week at Cartoon, you spend a whole week at MIPCOM, a whole week at MIPTV, you might go to NATPE — it really does start taking chunks out of your diary. I think to be honest they should be kept separate. Funding an animation series is completely different

from a feature film. There are a few video companies that are a common link, but broadcasters don't really need to be there. There's not that many that buy animated feature films or come in and co-produce. It's a whole different set of people who get involved in the feature film industry. The link is purely animation and the studios representing the producers. I think it would be a mistake to combine them.

HK: In the U.S. though, oftentimes a TV series will spin out of a feature.

JB: The animated feature market is dominated by the U.S. Live-action too whether it's *Godzilla* or *Men in Black*. That's part of franchise building. The European film industry is not at that level. You know you're not going to see the animated series of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *The Full Monty* or *Billy Elliot* for example. We're not producing movies that have those kind of TV spin-offs at least not in the kids' business. We're still trying to build a competing European industry.

HK: But what about *Help! I'm A Fish*? It is doing so well. We are hearing about it all the way in the U.S.

JB: Exactly. I think more and more shows and films like that are going to happen and it will become an increasingly popular event. Are American investors allowed into Cartoon Film? I would hope so 'cause if you don't bring in American film distributors more often than not you can pack up and go home. That's where all the money is in terms of the film industry. I should imagine 80 percent of the money spent on films now is



Hobnobbing in the courtyard.

coming out of America. Depriving yourself of that kind of financial support is perverse almost. Why make life that difficult for yourself when it's nigh on impossible to get a feature film off the ground as it is?

HK: On the lighter side, I heard that Gotland has some pretty mean miniature golf courses — did you manage to get a game in?

JB: I didn't no. Not because I don't play, but because I'm a dedicated professional! Actually, I'm one of those sad people that never manages to get their life sorted out to take advantage of all the facilities. The locations are a treat and every year I come away thinking, "God, why I didn't play mini golf?" But I never think about those things until I get there so it's too late. Either that or it's just the producers



Festivities under the tent included trailer screenings along with daily meal services.

who can afford to have fun, since they present their show then have time off. The rest of us have to check out everything just in case we're missing a diamond.

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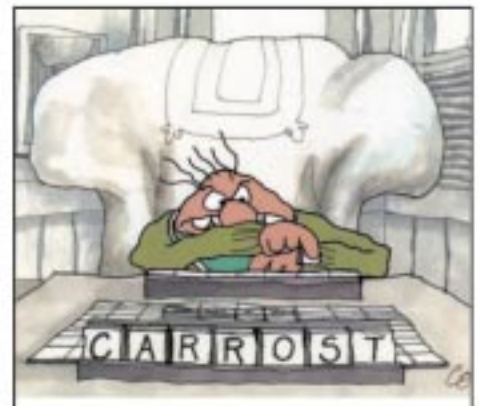
Heather Kenyon is editor-in-chief of Animation World Network. After receiving her B.F.A. in Filmic Writing from USC's School of Cinema-Television, she went to work for Hanna-Barbera Cartoons. Currently, she is an International Board Member of Women In Animation and on the Board of Trustees for Trees for Life.

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Since September



Honeycomb's *Binka and the Last Christmas*, just one of their current productions. © Honeycomb Aimation.

Let's check in with a few of the participants from this past year's Cartoon Forum and see where Gotland's leads have taken them. Participants include: Honeycomb Animation, Artoon S.A., Fictitious Egg and Sav! The World Productions.

All in all it seems that indeed Cartoon Forum is an event that leads to real results.

Binka

A pre-school series of 26 x 5 minutes, produced by Honeycomb Animation

Binka was presented to just under 100 TV buyers, distributors, producers and other animation professionals at this year's Cartoon Forum in Gotland. The project had the advantage of already having a sale to the BBC for UK terrestrial rights. It was received extremely well and had very complimentary things said about it, such as *Binka* being one of the few projects in

by Heather Kenyon

the Forum that was successfully aimed at its target audience. As a direct result of the Forum, ZDF confirmed that they would pre-buy the series for Germany. BBC TV have now taken out an additional license for digital rights and BBC Worldwide have put up an advance for worldwide distribution. The series is now in production and the first 13 will air in April 2001 followed by the second 13 next autumn. BBC Worldwide will launch the series at the BBC Showcase in February 2001.

Sara & Simon Bor
Designers, Developers & Directors
of *Binka*



Bahar

A series of 13 x 13 minute episodes, produced by Artoon, S.A.

The Cartoon Forum in Visby was a great opportunity for us to "test the waters." *Bahar* is a project addressed toward young adults, thus a project much more challenging than others, and difficult to fund as well! People liked the design very much and found the story quite intriguing. As soon as we finish development and send the complete dossier to all those who expressed an interest, we will know whether or not we will go ahead. (Even though we didn't have a huge crowd, there were people from Ellipse Animation, MTV Germany, EM TV Merchandising, among others, in attendance of our pitch.)

It was very interesting to find out that more "sophisticated" projects seem to find their own way now in the market. But time will tell!

Tina Pappas
Head of Public Relations and
Communication, Artoon, S.A.



Johnny Casanova - The Unstoppable Sex Machine

A series of 26 x 24 minute episodes, produced by Elephant Productions and Fictitious Egg

Johnny Casanova - The Unstoppable Sex Machine is a series for television and the Internet with Webisodes being produced as part of the package, aimed at a teen/adult audience. After a very successful presentation at Cartoon Forum in Gotland, Sweden, co-producers Elephant Productions and Fictitious Egg, generated a great deal of interest from a number of potential investors, and as a direct result of the Forum are now about to clinch a deal with universal. The series follows the adolescent adventures of 14-year-old Johnny Worms, who has changed his name to Casanova in an attempt to attract girls.

Also at the Forum, Elephant Productions presented the adult series *Genius*, based on the drawings of eccentric British cartoonist John Glashan, adapted by Martin Village and Roger Planer, with animation directed by Graham Ralph.

Andy Wyatt
Fictitious Egg



Thomas & Co.

A series of 26 x 13 minute episodes, produced by Sav! The World Productions

Thomas & Co., one of the most attended presentations at this year's Cartoon Forum, has attracted considerable attention since its debut in Gotland.

Centered around the lives of five 11-year-old suburban kids Thomas, Chloe, Ian, Zac and Latifa — the series is a chronicle of everyday life, and a break from the typical action-adventure cartoon. *Thomas & Co.* addresses all the issues young viewers might find themselves confronted with in real life. More complex subject matters, like the divorce of parents, will alternate with lighter ones, like a first love, or simply, how to tell your mom you want to quit those dreaded piano lessons. In all cases, the stories will be treated with a lot of humor, and a good dose of emotion.



**Sav! The World Productions' *Thomas & Co.*, a sitcom helping children with their life issues from their point of view.
© Sav! The World Productions.**

In advanced negotiations with two major European broadcasters and a European cable distributor, *Thomas & Co.* is currently

in pre-production and set for release in summer 2002. I am hoping to pre-sell the series to the American market at the upcoming NATPE.

Savin Yeatman-Eiffel
C.E.O. Sav! The World Productions
and creator of *Thomas & Co.*

Heather Kenyon is editor-in-chief of Animation World Network. After receiving her B.F.A. with honors in Filmic Writing from USC's School of Cinema-Television, she went to work for Hanna-Barbera Cartoons. Currently, she is an International Board Member of Women In Animation and on the Board of Trustees of Trees for Life.

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Fresh from the Festivals:

January 2001's Film Reviews

by Maureen Furniss

Within the world of animation, most experimentation occurs within short format productions, whether they be high budgeted commercials, low budgeted independent shorts, or something in between. The growing number of short film festivals around the world attest to the vitality of these works, but there are few other venues for exhibition of them or even written reviews. As a result, distribution tends to be difficult and irregular. On a regular basis, *Animation World Magazine* will highlight some of the most interesting with short descriptive overviews.

This month:

Armastuse Voimalikkusest (*On the Possibility of Love*, 1999), 15.5 min., directed by Janno Poldma, Estonia. Info: EESTI Joonisfilm Studio, Laulupeo 2, Tallinn, 100121, Estonia. Tel/Fax: 372-601-0275. E-mail: joonis@delfi.ee.

Just in Time (1999), 9 min., directed by Kirsten Winter, Germany. Info: Anigraf, Kirsten Winter, Boedekerstr. 92, Hannover, 30161, Germany. Tel: 49-511-66-0165. Fax: 49-511-66-7327. E-mail: kwinter@dm.fh-hannover.de.

Vision Point (1999), 1.5 min., directed by Stephen X. Arthur, Canada. Info: Stephen X. Arthur,

373 - 1755 Robson St., Vancouver, BC V6G 3B7, Canada.

Tel: 604-421-5046. Fax: 604-421-0957. E-mail: s_arthur@istar.ca. URL: mypage.direct.ca/w/writer/Ccurrent.html.

Passport (1999), 7 min., directed by Siri Melchior, Denmark. Info: Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London, SW7 ZEV, England. Fax: 44-020-75904500.

The Scarecrow (2000), 1.5 min., directed by Cheryl Meier, USA. Info: Cheryl Meier, 1950 Barret Lakes Blvd. #213, Kennesaw, GA 30144, USA. Tel: 678-290-6616.

On the Possibility of Love

Using cel animation,

Estonian animation director Janno Poldma has created an interesting take that claims to be about relationships. Like most Estonian films, though, the 'story' takes dryly humorous, unpredictable and sometimes enigmatic twists and turns, ultimately ending in a way that is satisfying, if not totally comprehensible. Perhaps the best known of Poldma's other directorial efforts, *1895* (made in 1995), is just as quixotic, though the two films are not what I'd call similar. No doubt that is due to the fact that *1895* was written by co-director Priit Pärn. For one thing, *On the Possibility of Love* is without dialogue, while *1895* relies heavily on a constant stream of voice-over narration that provides the pretense of a storyline.

On the Possibility of Love focuses on a family of three: a man, a woman and their son. The boy is a bratty child who cuts his father's suspenders, puts salt in his coffee and eats the family pet, much to the dismay of his mother. The boy's naughty activities are contrasted with the behavior of some troublemakers in the street,



On the Possibility of Love. © EESTI JoonisFilm.

a small band of men who throw things at the family's home and, when spied upon through a telescope, are even caught sawing up the surface of a distant planet. In the end, the couple unite as the man transforms into an officer on a horse and the woman, who had been watching — naked — in a tree, floats down to join him. Even the naughty boy's story seems to have a resolution, as he appears to be converted into a care-giver, taking over the place of his mother, who had acted as a nurse to a line of bird characters seeking attention from her. I know it might be hard to imagine, but it really does all seem to fit together in the end. If pressed to come up with a primary goal for this work, I'd go with a political agenda; the film seems to be saying that the troublemakers in the street are not much more than naughty vandals who never got the spankings they deserved when they were boys. I'm betting that the man and woman's relationship is just a distraction, one that is conventional in filmmaking.

Poldma has had a long history of working in not only animation, but theater and puppetry. He began working at Tallinnfilm Studio in 1973, as a camera assistant and then as a cameraman. In this capacity he filmed some of the earliest works of Estonian animation, including Rein Raamat's *Toll the Great and Hell*. Throughout the years, Poldma has worked in both 2D and 3D traditional animation techniques; his puppet films include *Brothers and Sisters* (1991) and *Otto's Life* (1992). Additionally, he has written a children's book, *Judo Boys* (1985); a feature film screenplay, "The Lamb Down in the Right Corner" (directed by Lembit Ulfak, 1992); and

several theatrical plays.



Just in Time. © Kirsten Winter.

Just in Time

In 1995, when I saw Kirsten Winter's powerful experimental film, *Clocks*, I was impressed by the manner in which she managed to capture the process of composer Elena Kats-Cherin at work (and I do not mean process in the sense of a 'procedure,' but rather as the spiritual working through of her material). Winter's latest work, *Just in Time*, is motivated out of the same aesthetic as *Clocks*, though the resulting film is very different. Whereas *Clocks* is dynamic and energized, *Just in Time* feels much more meditative. However, the two films are definitely of a kind in that they are both impressionistic, striving to create the feeling of an experience rather than a narrative about it. *Just in Time* is Winter's observation of many aspects of America, where she traveled by train for four weeks. In the film, she analyzes some icons of American culture, such as the Statue of Liberty, and the country's landscapes, both natural and man-made.

Winter's filmmaking technique has parallels to the process of music composition, as she considers her visuals and her music to be of equal importance. She thinks of her film visuals as notes, and uses a 'visual score' to create high and low tension as well as rhythm. In this respect, she can be seen as a practitioner of visual music, an art

that has existed for many years. Winter collaborated on *Muratti und Sarotti*, a film about German animators of the 1920s, when the visual music tradition was at a high point and Winter cites these films as a strong influence on her own work. It's easy to see how German visual music artists such as Oskar Fischinger or Walther Ruttmann have impacted her use of oil painting in *Clocks*, as bold strokes accompany the equally strong, pulsing score. However, in *Just in Time*, I also feel the influence of future generations of visual music filmmakers, such as James Whitney or a handful of other abstract filmmakers working during the 1950s and 1960s. I say this because of the almost solarized effects in portions of her film as well as the mandala-like use of bright, centered light that creates the meditative quality I sense in the film. Whether this influence is actual or coincidental, there are affinities between *Just in Time* and Whitney's films, for example, in their exploration of the essence of things and our inner experience of them. The contemplative quality of *Just in Time*, like *SMASH* before it, is partly the result of Winter's brush with death in a bad car accident, which almost killed her.

Winter has experimented with different techniques as she creates her works. She made *Clocks* using photos and oil painting. High 8 video and oil painting applied directly to a computer monitor were incorporated into her second film, *SMASH*, in 1997. In *Just in Time* (her third work), she has begun using scratching on film, along with filters applied in the lab, in her assemblage of live-action footage, oil paint and computer-generated imagery. Here sometimes digital video images

were treated in After Effects and combined with painting while she shot frame-by-frame off a computer monitor, using a 35mm animation camera. Like her previous two films, *Just in Time* is without dialogue, but in this case her composer was Simon Stockhausen. Winter's work is supported in part by sponsorship by the German government, which has a system for funding independent film production. She currently teaches part-time at a College of Fine Arts in Hanover, plus she is working on a number of new short pieces. She works out of her studio, anigraf filmproduction, which she co-founded with Gerd Gockell in 1990.

Vision Point

In *Vision Point*, director Stephen X. Arthur takes viewers on another journey, this time across the landscape of Canada, which he traversed with his wife, Joyce Arthur. While she was driving through the Western portion of the country on the Trans Canada Highway, Arthur captured time-lapse images with a Pentax 35mm still camera, zooming in with a 200 mm lens. These images were later manipulated with Adobe After Effects, which also was used to create a heartbeat-like sound track for the film. *Flight of the Stone* (directed by Susanne Fränzel), a similar work that I recently reviewed, uses the 'narrative device' of a stone flying through the air to tie its 15 minutes of international landscapes together. In contrast, Arthur's images are united only thematically, as his goal was to abstract fundamental differences among regions of Canada. This strategy works in part because *Vision Point* is only one and a half minutes

long; the repeated images form a rhythm in combination with the soundtrack, while changes in perspective and landscape types provide visual interest.



Vision Point. © Stephen X. Arthur.

With a background in zoology and physiology, as well as an MFA in film production from the University of Southern California, Arthur brings an interesting scientific, analytical perspective to his work in animation. Among his strongest influences, he cites Norman McLaren, Paul Driessen, Jan Svankmajer and Werner Herzog, and he most admires the Bros. Quay for their employment

of surrealism as 'true freedom from the intellect' and for their total devotion to their art. I do not see *Vision Point* as particularly surreal in its aesthetic, though Arthur himself describes it that way. However, I think he has achieved an entertaining and even slightly humorous film that is enjoyable to watch and might be studied for the way in which movement helps to sustain visual interest.

Arthur also explains that his inspiration came in part from Bart Testa's 1989 book, *Spirit in the Landscape*, which focuses on Canadian avant-garde landscape films in terms of the Canadian landscape-painting tradition. *Vision Point* was funded by a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. It has been screened at events worldwide.

Passport

Passport is yet another accomplished student film from the Royal College of Art, which



Passport. © Royal College of Art.

seems to be doing more than a little right, judging by the number of excellent productions that have emerged from it in recent years. This post-graduate thesis film employs cutouts on multiplane scraper boards, black and white imagery, dimmed lighting with chiarascuro-type effects, and sound elements to set the scene for a family's ill-fated trip on a night train.

The film's director, Siri Melchior, studied art history and graphic design in Denmark before going to the U.K.'s Royal College of Art and acknowledges the influence of Russian animation upon the work. This influence is clear in the overall look of the piece, which brings to mind the visual design and even the animation style of Yuri Norstein. The story itself, which runs almost 7-minutes in length, also seems to be set within an Eastern European context. A family escapes a crowded, highly secured train station, boarding a train car after showing documents that officials accept cautiously, after scrutiny. As the family sleeps, though, a thief takes the passports from their room. Officials arrive and force them off the train, so they apparently lose their chance for freedom.

Like the other films reviewed this month, *Passport* is without dialogue. The film's score was created by Danish composer

Soren Sigumfeldt Eriksen. *Passport's* production was supported by the Royal College of Art as well as Danish student grants. The film has been well received in competition, having won best student work awards at both the Ottawa and Stuttgart festivals in 1999.

The Scarecrow

American Cheryl Meier has created a very different student work with her 1.5 minute film, *The Scarecrow*. This senior thesis for the Ringling School of Art and Design was created using Maya 2.0. It tells the story of a scarecrow who decides to break out of his place in life and does so with the help of some crows. Meier says she was inspired to create the film when she drove past two real scarecrows standing guard in a sunflower farm. To get the sense of what a real scarecrow might feel as it tugged at the wooden boards that hold it up, she rigged herself to hang from a post!

Though Meier cites Disney and Pixar as influences in terms of story and visual design, her work is actually a lot softer and atmospheric than most of the computer animation work I associate with those companies. She employs soft colors and a kind of hazy fog that hangs just above the ground and gives depth to the scene. On the other hand, Meier's ability to instill a lot of character into the scarecrow within a short time would seem to reflect her study of personality animation created by the two studios. Through movement and the setting of small goals that the character sets out to achieve, viewers are able to identify with this character's struggle for freedom, which occurs in less than two minutes. Sound effects lend a

hand at establishing the aesthetics of the film, as the scarecrow finally is able to hobble off, having employed the posts that originally held him captive as legs that now set him free.

The Scarecrow has been screened at SIGGRAPH and a variety of other showcases, and will be featured in an upcoming episode of *Exposure* on the Sci-Fi Channel. Meier is currently working on a feature film, *Helgo, A Hero's Journey*, at Fathom Studios, which is located in Atlanta, Georgia.

Maureen Furniss, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor and Program Director of Film Studies at Chapman University in Orange, California. She is the founding editor of Animation Journal and the author of Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics (John Libbey, 1998).

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.



The Scarecrow. © Cheryl Meier.

Catch the DVD of *Chicken Run*

by **Jacquie Kubin**

When the characters of Wallace & Gromit were introduced in 1992 (*A Grand Day Out*), creator/director Nick Park added a new chapter to stop-action animation history. Winning Academy Awards for Best Short Animated Film [*The Wrong Trousers* (1994) and *A Close Shave* (1996)], it is a question of which came first, the chicken or the egg, when Park was targeted, along with Peter Lord, to bring *Chicken Run* to stop-motion animated life. "I think that Jeffrey Katzenberg, in his earlier Disney years, had seen and was impressed by Nick and Peter's work and the style of animation," says Kelly Sooter, head of domestic home video for DreamWorks Pictures. "Over the years he has been looking for a project that would work within this animation style." In addition to a fun bit of filmmaking, the *Chicken Run Special Edition* DVD includes bonus footage featuring Lord and Park's commentary, two behind-the-scenes featurettes, trailers, bios and production notes. The additional material gives a great look at the behind the scenes process of stop-motion animation. "The directors see the value of the bonus material and we got a tremendous amount of support from them in the development of this extra



With additional materials including a behind the scenes look at stop-motion animation, the *Chicken Run* DVD is now available. © DreamWorks Pictures.

material," Sooter says. "It is an opportunity to extend the movie beyond the theatrical release, and allows the animator to take the property to the next level. The level of enthusiasm is exciting because we get to work with the

animators and they get to be creative in a whole new way." In addition, the DVD can be popped into a computer for two interactive games, desktop icons, chicken pets and screensavers.

Jacquie Kubin, a Washington, DC-based freelance journalist, enjoys writing about the electronic entertainment and edutainment mediums, including the Internet. She is a frequent contributor to the Washington Times and Krause Publication magazines. She has won the 1998 Certificate of Award granted by the Metropolitan Area Mass Media Committee of the American Association of University Women.

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***Chicken Run*, directed by Peter Lord and Nick Park. © DreamWorks Pictures.**

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New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews

by Fred Patten

Around 1995, Japanese animation (anime) began pouring into North America, Europe and across the globe in video form. Most of these titles were unknown outside of Japan and never covered by animation journals. Whether a title is highly popular or very obscure, a high-quality theatrical feature or a cheap and unimaginative direct-to-video release, they all look the same on a store shelf. Therefore, *Animation World Magazine* will regularly review several new releases (including re-releases not previously covered) that have some merit and about which our readers should know.

The Legend of Black Heaven. V.1, Rock Bottom. V.2, Space Truckin'.

TV series, 1999. Director: Yasuhito Kikuchi. V.1, 4 episodes, 100 minutes. V.2 - V.4, 3 episodes each, 75 minutes each. Price & format: \$24.98 each subtitled or dubbed video; \$29.98 bilingual DVD. Distributor: Pioneer. (V.3 & 4 to come.)

This 1999 Japanese prime time TV comedy is notable for two special aspects: its idealization of 1970s/'80s heavy metal music (and the work of popular guitarist Michael Schenker in particular), and a plot designed primarily for an audience a generation older than the usual children and teens.

Oji Tanaka appears to be a typical white-collar salaryman in the Japanese business world. He is actually so apathetic that he is

about to be fired. In the early 1980s he was "Gabriel" Tanaka, the lead guitarist in Black Heaven, a hot Japanese band that imitated the latest sounds from such new rock gods as Michael Schenker. But he got married, and traded his dream for a steady paycheck in order to raise a family. Today his family ignores him except as a breadwinner. His wife throws out his prized guitar to make room for their child's toys.



Life starts to crush, middle-aged Oji's dreams, until he finds out that only his special sound can save the universe in *Black Heaven*.
© 1997 AIC • Pioneer LDC, Inc.

Just as Oji's disillusion is about to become terminal, a new employee, Layla Yuki, claims to be a fan of his music. She lures him through a dimensional portal to an alternate world where Earth is losing a space war. The only hope of defeating the invaders is a new

sonic weapon which needs the vibrations of Oji's unique electronic hard-rock playing. Learning that his music is still appreciated brings Oji back to life.



The mysterious woman who calls Oji back to the magic of performing.
© 1997 AIC • Pioneer LDC, Inc.

Black Heaven is a funky comedy packed with references to the rock and anime scenes of the early '80s. Layla's repeated weak excuses to drag Oji off to the hidden portal are interpreted by his office workers and neighbors as an illicit affair, especially since she uses sultry phrases like "the stairway to heaven" which sound like risqué *double entendres*. (Oji recognizes "Stairway to Heaven" as the title of a Led Zeppelin classic. All the episode titles like "Rock Bottom" are named after notable heavy metal hits.) Japanese viewers, and American fans of the 1980s' *Robotech* TV cartoons from Japan, will recognize the improbable concept of defeating space invaders with rock music as a pastiche of the 1982 anime TV hit in which space invaders were traumatized by the melodies of an interplanetary pop singer. The

alternate-world space war subplot parodies the Japanese live-action kids' TV genre that has been Americanized as *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*. The main action centers around Oji's attempt to resurrect his dream, to get his band back together and prove that Black Heaven still swings, while avoiding the appearance of a sex scandal that could ruin his marriage and his career. His efforts not incidentally revitalize his relationship with wife Yoshiko and make him a hero to his young son Gen. ("My Dad is helping the UFO Rangers fight the Dark Nebula Demonic Army!? COOL!!!") Some of the Japanese cultural jokes will be over the heads of American viewers (the *Black Heaven* title is for the American market; the Japanese title is *Kacho Oji, Oji the Assistant Section Head*, but the popular Japanese name Oji means "prince" and he is gradually revealed as a "disguised prince among commoners"), but there is enough humor that comes through to amuse Yankees satisfactorily.

Black Heaven's most obvious theme is consciously exaggerated wish-fulfillment fantasy for an audience ready for a mid-life crisis, that would like to return to their youthful music and TV favorites and dream of a second chance at their whole future. Hard rock and 1980s anime is also still 'in' with the current teen generation, and will demonstrate to them that Dad may not be so square, after all (*A Goofy Movie*, anybody?). And there is enough real hard rock music (the theme song, "Cautionary Warning," by John Sykes, a rock guitarist whose group has toured Japan several times, in the original arrangement plus two new arrangements;

Michael Schenker Group's "In the Arena;" and original TV rock songs to match by Hironobu Kageyama and Riyu Konaka) to please serious rock fans.

The animation quality — okay, so it was a low-budget TV production (13 weekly episodes, July 8 - October 7, 1999). Nobody disses the Jay Ward TV cartoons for their cheap production values, do they? The two animation studios, A.I.C. (Anime International Company) and A.P.P.P. Co. (Another Push Pin Production), both do much better with larger-budget productions.



Set in 19th century Japan, *Samurai X* tells the story of a land torn by warfare and rebellion where small bands of soldiers seek to overthrow the tyrannical Tokugawa Shogunate. © A.D. Vision, Inc.

Samurai X: Rurouni Kenshin. V.1, Trust. V.2, Betrayal.

Original animation video (OAV) series, 1999. Director: Kazuhiro Furuhashi. 60 minutes each. Price & format: video \$29.95 subtitled/\$19.98 dubbed each; DVD bilingual \$29.98 each. Distributor: A. D. Vision Films.

[This gets confusing:

Samurai X is the title of the video dubbed edition, while *Rurouni Kenshin* is the title of the subtitled video and the DVD edition. Plus, there is a separate *Rurouni Kenshin* TV series which is getting a simultaneous U.S. video release from another company, Media Blasters.]

Japanese animation first gained a cult following in America for its giant robot battlefests and space adventure epics. But there are many viewers who prefer the historical dramas, which offer a genuine historical background in a setting so exotic and so unknown to non-Japanese that it might as well be on a planet far, far away. This story takes place during the traumatic collapse of the 250-year Shogunate period (1601-1868), which occurred between the visit of Commodore Perry's fleet in 1853 to open Japan forcibly to world trade, and 1868 when the emperor was restored.

Rurouni Kenshin began as an immensely popular comic book (manga) historical serial by Nobuhiro Watsuki from 1994 to 1999. It was quickly adapted as a 94-episode animated TV series, running from January 10, 1996 through September 8, 1998 (currently being released separately in America under Media Blasters' AnimeWorks video label); there was also an anime theatrical feature in December 1997. Set in 1879, it tells the adventures of a group of teens who gather around Kenshin, a rurouni (ronin; vagabond samurai) in his late twenties on a self-imposed pilgrimage of redemption. When he was just a young teen, Kenshin was the deadliest assassin of the reformers who fought the Shogunate. Disillusioned by all the killing on both sides in the name



Samurai X's central character, Kenshin, a young orphan trained to be a deadly assassin, with the mysterious woman named Tomoe. © A.D.Vision, Inc.

of noble ideals, he hopes to atone for his violent past.

Samurai X (the title refers to the cross-shaped scar on Kenshin's cheek) is a two-hour, four episode direct-to video series released as *Rurouni Kenshin: Reminiscence* in 1999. It is Kenshin's origin story, showing his violent past which was hinted at in the TV series. Kenshin bursts into the shadow civil war as an idealistic 14-year-old whose lithe dexterity is taken advantage of by the reformers to use him as a murderer of their political opponents. The first half hour episode establishes this; the following three switch to somber despair as Kenshin realizes that he is no better than the "enemies of the people" he is ordered to slay. Kenshin's failed attempt to escape into a peaceful life as a farmer, and his resolution to die in battle against the Shogun's agents, move forward with a growing inevitability which portends an unalterable fate. (Yet, since this is a prequel to the TV series, viewers are supposed to know that Kenshin will, somehow, survive.) Director Furuhashi builds an emotional impact with calm, poetic imagery such as slowly dripping blood upon snow which skillfully gets the most out of limited animation. (Production by Studio Deen.)

Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise.

Theatrical feature, 1987. Director: Hiroyuki Yamaga. 125 minutes. Price & format: \$29.95 DVD. Distributor: Manga Entertainment.

Royal Space Force was a milestone in Japanese animation history. A small group of young animators persuaded entertainment giant Bandai to fund their new studio's first theatrical feature; an intellectual sci-fi drama with no merchandising tie-ins. The movie bombed financially but won critical raves that established Studio Gainax's reputation. Also, the movie's video release helped demonstrate the potential of Japan's new anime video market.

The movie typifies much of anime in emphasizing art — richly detailed backgrounds and costumes — and story rather than full animation. *Royal Space Force* in particular has stunned audiences with its elaborate setting of an alternate Earth. Rather than merely showing normal society with fictional nations or historical figures, *RSF* depicts a completely original civilization with unique yet plausible designs of everything from religions to clothes and household



Founded in 1984, Studio Gainax was newly opened just to produce *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise*. © Bandai Entertainment.

artifacts. Even the symphonic score by Ryuichi Sakamoto has an unusually sharp metallic undertone that enhances the exoticism.

Shirotsugh Lhadatt is a young sailor assigned to the Kingdom of Honneamise's tiny disaster-prone space program just as war looms. The commander is determined to orbit an astronaut before the Space Force is absorbed into the military effort. Shiro's enthusiasm at being chosen as the astronaut is tempered by



Shirotsugh Lhadatt finds himself amidst the scenery of war. © Bandai Entertainment.

the realization of all the safety testing they are bypassing. An equal worry is that the launch site is right on the border, and is sure to be captured or destroyed if fighting starts before the rocket is completed. Royal Space Force strikes a delicate balance of realistic, serious technological research; the drama of political tension, espionage and warfare; and the inspirational uplift of a young everyman's consideration of the space program's moral and social considerations (Shiro's girlfriend worries that the rocket could be used as a new weapon) and conviction of its positive benefits.

Sol Bianca: The Legacy. V.1, Lost Treasures. V.2, Separation. V.3, Going Home.

Original animation video (OAV) series, 2000. Director: Hiroyuki Ochi. 60 minutes each. Price each & format: \$29.98 subtitled video, \$24.98 dubbed video, \$29.98 DVD bilingual. Distributor: Pioneer.

There is a school of thought that animated cartoons should look pretty but do not

need to make much sense. *Sol Bianca: The Legacy* certainly plays to this philosophy. Yet its empty-headedness is unusually intellectual. Viewers will recognize the Alhambra in a palace on a distant planet, or that soaring holographic statues are based upon Alphonse Mucha's Art Nouveau posters. A giant maze is boastfully acknowledged to be a mechanical recreation (with deadly traps) of the levels of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. And where else would you find attacking space pirates dressed as though they were attending an opera?

This is a sequel of sorts to *Sol Bianca*, a 1990 OAV space opera from A.I.C. (Anime International Co.) about a band of sexy all-girl space pirates who steal only from despicable planetary dictators. It was a mindless *Star Wars* imitation, but had very nice art design by Naoyuki Onda. Ten years later, A.I.C. has upped the ante with this second *Sol Bianca*, a serial consisting of six half-hour episodes, two per volume. It nominally presents the same crew in a new adventure, except that the

characters have different origins and relationships. What is important is that there is no longer any pretense that the story is important.



Sol Bianca: The Legacy continues the tale of an all-female pirate crew on a ship with unmatched technology. © 1999 AIC / Pioneer LDC, Pioneer Entertainment (USA) L.P.

Instead, this is an artistic *tour de force* for Director Hiroyuki Ochi and his staff of character and mechanical designers, notably Naoyuki Onda again, Atsushi Takeuchi, Koji Watanabe, Kenji Teraoka and Nobuhito Sue, with extensive 3D CGI work by Satoshi Shimura. The emphasis is on beauty. All men are handsome, all women are lovely, and every scene looks like it is posed (i.e., not much actual animation) for a fashion magazine. The space adventure still has gaping holes in its logic, compounded by a plot that jumps forward *in medias res* and leaves the viewer to puzzle together the 25th(?) century interstellar background from cryptic references to "the decline since the Space Frontier Age," "the search for lost Earth" and so forth. But there are now all the *nudge nudge wink wink* background cul-



Sol Bianca's cast of characters. © 1999 AIC / Pioneer LDC, Pioneer Entertainment (USA) L.P.

tural references to Inca ruins, Spanish architecture, the literature of Thomas Mann, etc., to indicate that any lapses in the plot are not because of a lack of sophistication. Rather, the viewer is meant to appreciate the visual aspects (Ochi's skillful direction distracts the viewer from the limited animation), and the personality interplay between space pirates April, Janny, Feb, Jun and young stow-away Mayo. These are the real focus of the adventure.

As added evidence of the emphasis on the art direction, the opening credits and each preview of the next volume are edited to make an excellent music video. The DVDs also contain "Anime-tronic" music clips which are bonus music videos of 8 to 10 minutes.



The OAV series, *Virgin Fleet*, is the story of young female cadets and their role in the Japanese military. © 1998 RED / Ohji Hiroi / AIC / IMAGAWA / BEAM ENTERTAINMENT.

Virgin Fleet.

Original animation video (OAV) series, 1998. Director: Masahiro Hosoda. 90-minutes. Price & format: \$19.99 dubbed video; \$29.99 bilingual DVD. Distributor: U.S. Manga Corps./Central Park Media.

Even minor anime titles can

have points of interest. *Virgin Fleet* is an example of what may be building up to a new sub-genre of teen military comedies about untested all-female combat units who must prove they can fight as well as the men. What makes *Virgin Fleet* (originally a three half-hour OAV series) particularly interesting is its alternate-history premise.

The setting is an Earth where atomic power has not been discovered, but Japanese research into paranormal mental powers has awakened psionic energy in some humans — but only women, and only as long as they are virgins. Fifteen years earlier, in a conflict similar to World War II, a ship of young women with this talent sunk a "federation" invasion fleet. This resulted in a cease-fire that has lasted to the present. A naval girl's academy has been opened to train new girls with psychic energy to crew a Virgin Fleet.

This is the background for a mostly silly teen farce. Japan has been at peace for so long that the academy has turned into a finishing school where giggly teens play at being sailors and navy aviators. New student Shiokaze Umino has enrolled to demonstrate she is still a virgin, to make a respectable bride for handsome Mau Sakisaka. Cadet leader Satsuki Yukimizawa, who is overly gung-ho about the fleet's military mission, is determined to force Shiokaze out. The schoolgirl catfights (with Mau as a comically inept mediator) play into the hands of naval Chief Tatsugawa, a reactionary who has been trying to persuade the government to abandon the Virgin Fleet and rebuild the Imperial Navy. The plot turns dramatic when enemy spies try to sabotage the Virgin Fleet in preparation for a reactivation of the war. Satsuki is

ready to fight but she lacks enough Virgin Energy. Shiokaze has the energy, but she freezes in panic at the prospect of real danger.



Trained in the use of "Virgin Energy," the cadets amass serious blasting power capable of blowing enemy war planes out of the sky. © 1998 RED / Ohji Hiroi / AIC / IMAGAWA / BEAM ENTERTAINMENT.

I was intrigued by *Virgin Fleet's* background portrayal of a Japan that has rebuilt itself without the dominating cultural influence of a Western occupation. There is technical modernization in appliances and the news media, but architecture and clothing styles are closer to those of 1940s Japan. The score by Masumi Ito is modern movie-music when punching up the action scenes, but in the style of traditional Japanese music in the street scenes. Even the opening and closing theme songs by Chisa Tanabe are pseudo-1940s or 1950s Japanese pop music, before it became as heavily Westernized as in our world today. (Production by A.I.C.)

Fred Patten has written on anime for fan and professional magazines since the late 1970s.

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Technology news compiled and written by Paul Younghusband.

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- First Eight Episodes of Sailor Moon Make It To Video

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Next Issue's Highlights

Gaming, February 2001

This month we take a look at one area of animation that has been showing enormous and steady growth. With game development on the rise and the emergence of new platforms, the gaming industry is rich with possibilities – not only economic but also artistic. Jacquie Kubin tells us why gaming is bigger than ever and how animators can bank on it in the future. Paul Younghusband discovers why Artworld UK is one of the leading, innovative gaming companies using digital images across several mediums for both continuity and profits. Plus, we are also going to look at the future of gaming: What are games going to look like in the distant future? You may not even recognize them.

We also have a very special interview with Charlie Adler, conducted by the always entertaining Will Ryan. As the Rugrats take on the big screen again, Charlie will discuss them, his career and more. Sit down with one of the hardest working actors and directors in Hollywood today. Maria Janeva is going to take an in-depth look at Bulgarian animation, highlighting their history. In the Student Corner, Glenn Vilppu returns to discuss texture as planes to expand your sketching skills further. Gregory Singer will profile eKids, the latest player to tackle the sensitive Internet kids' market. Fred Patten returns with his new anime picks, as well as Maureen Furniss with her short film reviews. And don't forget to find out what the Animation Pimp has to rant about this month. Also, get ready to take a look at a new Mac-based pencil test system and hear what AWN associate editor Rick DeMott has to say about the latest book on animation scriptwriting.

Upcoming Editorial Calendar

Gaming	February 2001
Technology	March 2001
The Business of Animation	April 2001
Recruiting and Jobs	May 2001